



Oradour-sur-Glâne: On the emergence of a glocal site of memory in France¹

Eva Léger

Etudes Romanes EA 369, Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, 200, avenue de la République, 92001 NANTERRE
e-mail: evaleger@hotmail.fr

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ABSTRACT: Oradour-sur-Glâne (France) is the memorial site of a massacre perpetrated by the Second SS Panzer Division *Das Reich* on June 10th, 1944. It preserves the memory of the 642 people slaughtered there, including 18 Spanish refugees. In 1945, the French State, led by General de Gaulle, decided to preserve the ruins of Oradour-sur-Glâne. Since then, a series of commemorative processes have ensued at the site, corresponding to different temporalities. Over time, this site of national memory has been linked both with European memory discourse and with the private memory of exiled Spaniards and, consequently, with the memory of the Spanish Civil War and Francoism. In this article, I analyze the different appropriations and interpretations of the site, focusing in particular on the memory of the exiles. To do so, I will look into the initiatives undertaken between 2008 and 2014, considering both the institutions and the associations related to Oradour-sur-Glâne.

KEYWORDS: Second World War; Oradour-sur-Glâne; massacre; site of memory; Republican exile; Association of memory-message

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RESUMEN: *Oradour-sur-Glâne, sobre la emergencia de un lugar de memoria glocal en Francia.*- Oradour-sur-Glâne (Francia) es el lugar de memoria de una masacre perpetrada por la segunda división blindada S.S. *Das Reich* el 10 de junio de 1944 que conserva el recuerdo de sus 642 suplicados, entre los cuales 18 españoles refugiados. En 1945, el Estado francés encabezado por el General de Gaulle decidió preservar las ruinas de Oradour-sur-Glâne. Desde entonces, diferentes procesos conmemorativos, correspondientes a temporalidades destacadas, se han sucedido en el sitio. Con el tiempo, este lugar de memoria nacional, se ha vinculado tanto con un discurso de memoria europeo como con la memoria particular de los españoles exiliados y a través de ello con la memoria de la Guerra Civil española y del franquismo. En este estudio analizaré las diferentes apropiaciones e interpretaciones de este lugar, enfocándome especialmente en la memoria de los exiliados. Para esto, contemplaré las iniciativas que se han desarrollado entre los años 2008 y 2014, atendiendo tanto a las instituciones como a las asociaciones que tengan relación con Oradour-sur-Glâne.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Segunda Guerra Mundial; Oradour-sur-Glâne; masacre; lugar de memoria; exilio republicano; Asociación de memoria-mensaje

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INTRODUCTION

On June 10th, 1944, the Second SS Panzer Division *Das Reich* entered the village of Oradour-sur-Glane, in the province of Haute-Vienne (region of Limousin, central France) and gathered the entire population together in the main square. There, the SS seized the men, divided them among four garages and barns, shot them and set the buildings alight. The women and children were taken to the church and shut inside with explosives that failed to go off, emitting instead a dense smoke that suffocated the people trapped there. When some of them tried to escape, the SS opened the doors and shot them, before setting fire to the place of worship. They then burned the village to the ground. Only five men managed to escape from the garages, while just one woman who had jumped out of a church window survived the gunfire. Given the magnitude of the massacre and the difficulty identifying the burnt corpses, it was not until 1947 that an official list of the 642 victims of Oradour-sur-Glane was drawn up by the court of Rochechouart (Fouché, 2003: 191).

This dramatic event, which took place four days after the allied landings in Normandy, had a huge impact in both the Limousin region and throughout the whole of France. The type of crimes perpetrated by this SS division along the whole repressive route they had taken from Montauban to the mass killings committed in Tulle² and Oradour-sur-Glane, had been commonplace in the war in the Soviet Union, where *Das Reich* had come from (Centre de la mémoire d'Oradour-sur-Glane, 2000: 46-50), but they were unusual in France. The Second Division B *Das Reich* had been sent to the Limousin region to eliminate pockets of resistance. By attacking the civilian population, they sustained a climate of terror (Fouché, 2003: 65).

After the liberation of France, survivors and witnesses of the tragedy were encouraged to talk about the events and they became witnesses of reference: Robert Hébras, for instance, a survivor of one of the garages, continues to recount the drama even today, surrounded by the ruins, gives talks and writes books on his experience, receives institutional delegations and so on. Survivors and victims' families took the decision to join together in an association: the National Association of Martyrs' Families (ANFM), which proclaimed a generation of mourning and began organizing annual commemorative events in 1953.

Consequently, the memorialization of this tragedy was not just a family matter, but became a public affair and even a political issue. Indeed, when the war was over, in his search for symbols that would reunify the French nation in the wake of the German occupation and Vichy, General de Gaulle, as head of the provisional government, decided that the ruins of Oradour-sur-Glane should be preserved as a symbol of Nazi barbarism and of the slaughter of an innocent French village that was to embody the suffering of the whole country (Farmer, 2007: 89). After 1947, a new Oradour-sur-Glane was built beside the ruins, which were declared a "Historical Monument".

With the passing of the years, the ruins of Oradour no longer embody French national memory alone. This "site of memory" (Nora, 1984) is by definition "a crossroads of different paths of memory" and has a "capacity to be constantly remodeled to last, to be revisited and redefined" (Hartog, 1995: 1231). From the end of the 1990s, the discourse related to Oradour-sur-Glane has, on the one hand, evolved towards a transnational memory of victims of barbarism. On the other, the preserved ruins have attracted other memories related to the place that had previously been omitted. In particular, the memories of Spanish Republican exiles have found their own site of memory at Oradour. For a long time, the French account did not leave any room for the specific story of the 18 Spanish victims exiled in France who were among the dead in Oradour-sur-Glane. But *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* –a "message memory" association (Namer, 1987: 142) created in 2008 by descendants of the region's exiles– now preserves, maintains and disseminates an account of Spanish exiles in the region. It is the main mouthpiece of the memories of Spanish republicans in the region of Limousin. Its interests have focused primarily on three key moments in the memory of the Spanish exile: the detention of refugees in concentration camps in 1939, the Resistance –since the region of Limousin was home to many Maquis during the Second World War– and the massacre in Oradour-sur-Glane, where the victims included 18 Spanish refugees.

The association's interest in Oradour-sur-Glane has led to a series of initiatives related to the site of memory. By considering some of the actions undertaken and their repercussions, I suggest two cross-cutting issues that will guide the analysis of the memories of the Spanish exile associated with Oradour-sur-Glane: How could a specific and localized event in the past reach Spain today? Why has the site of memory of Oradour become a privileged entry-point for understanding the memory of the Spanish exile on different levels?

In this article, I shall highlight different temporalities in which the memory of the place has evolved in such a way as to link it to the memory of the Spanish exile. Focusing specifically on the initiatives implemented between 2008 and 2014, I will first explain how the drama of Oradour-sur-Glane, which became an institutionalized European site of memory in 1999, came to include part of the Spanish past in its story. Secondly, the unknown case of the Spanish victims who died in the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre will lead me to focus on associative interests both in the Limousin region, through *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin*, and in Spain, through *Foro por la Memoria de Guadalajara* [Guadalajara Forum for Memory], highlighting differences in their respective discourses on this site of memory. Finally, I shall consider the 70th anniversary of this tragedy in 2014, when a new age of visibility appeared to emerge in the public realm regarding the memory of the Spanish exile, and I shall point to what makes the memory of the exile in Limousin particularly significant.

FROM SANCTUARY TO EUROPEAN SITE OF MEMORY

Once a specific tragedy and site of family mourning, Oradour was to become a national symbol for “exemplary memory” (Todorov, 1995: 30). This made it the “victim” of considerable political instrumentalization, which, in turn, had a major impact on families. On the one hand, the conservation of the ruins and the trail of violence left behind generate, even today, a painful remembrance for families. On the other, the desolate village has an overwhelming effect on visitors, who are invited to look back on the tragedy and think on this past in its “literal” sense, as a past that cannot be overcome (Todorov, 1995: 30).

In the hegemonic struggle between Gaullists and Communists regarding the memory of the Second World War, especially with regard to the Resistance (Wieviorka, 2010), both groups tried to appropriate the painful memory of the tragedy of Oradour-sur-Glâne (Fouché, 2003: 9). Use of the memory of the massacre for political ends reached its apex in Bordeaux in 1953, when the perpetrators of the massacre went on trial. None of the main mal-factors –including the head of operations, Heinz Lammerding– were actually put in the dock. Of the 21 prisoners, two were condemned to death while the rest were sentenced to imprisonment or forced labor for periods of between 5 and 12 years. Fourteen of the accused were Frenchmen from Alsace, “Malgré-nous” forced to join the Nazi militias and released by an amnesty law passed by parliament (Javerliat, 2009). The Gaullist position –in favor of the amnesty– and the Communist stance –which, calling for an exemplary trial, used the tragedy for their own interests during the Cold War– were both rejected by the association of relatives. Indeed, after 1953, the ANFM turned its back on the institutions and political organizations altogether and from that point on, organized commemorations without political or institutional support (Fouché, 2003: 241).

At the Bordeaux trial, the perpetrators at no point asked for forgiveness. Indeed, the Nazi defense even put forward a revisionist argument, claiming that there had been armed Maquis hidden inside the church, a circumstance which justified the slaughter of more than 450 women and children. This argumentation is still wielded today, as shown by the negationist discourse of Vincent Reynouard who also uses the presence of the Spanish political refugees to support his case.³ Over time, other interpretations of the massacre arose, including adaptations of the drama in novelized fiction in the 1980s (Farmer, 2007: 218–220). This added to the suffering of relatives who, in an attempt to protect themselves, were partly responsible for turning the memory of the massacre into an impenetrable memory and Oradour itself into a sanctuary. Religious terminology is omnipresent in the account of the tragedy and, even today, Oradour-sur-Glâne is characterized as a “martyred village” (Farmer, 2007: 90).

In the late 1990s, however, a new age finally opened up for the site of memory. On the 16th of July 1999, French President, Jacques Chirac, opened the Center of

Memory of Oradour-sur-Glâne, a museum created on the initiative of the provincial government (Conseil Général de la Haute-Vienne) and dedicated to communicating a message that the eroded ruins could no longer transmit so powerfully –despite conservation efforts, the traces of violence have inevitably faded over time. The Center’s first director, Jean-Jacques Fouché, who conducted historical research into *Das Reich* division, endeavored to ensure that the account narrated in the permanent exhibition incorporated the tragedy into the European narrative of the history of the Second World War. This was no easy task, given the weight of the “community memory” in Oradour-sur-Glâne (Fouché, 2002). But today, the exhibition still comprises five different sequences. The initial section provides the global context, covering circumstances from Hitler’s Germany to the Vichy regime in France. A second part offers a parallel description of *Das Reich* division, a terror militia, on the one hand, and of Oradour-sur-Glâne, a quiet rural village, on the other. This sequence includes a brief presentation of the reasons why people from outside Oradour-sur-Glâne were in the village at the time of the slaughter (Polish and Spanish workers and their families, dispossessed French Jews, Alsatian refugees, etc.). The final three sequences tell the story of the tragedy, its acknowledgement by the authorities and the rebuilding of the village, concluding with a message of universal peace. After serving as a stage for the reconciliation of the French nation after the end of the war, Oradour-sur-Glâne had now become a consolidation stage of the European Union. Indeed, in September 2013, a new stage of Franco-German reconciliation was marked by the official visit to the ruins of Presidents Hollande and Gauck.

As well as a historical narrative in a site dominated by “literal memory” (Todorov, 1995: 30), the museumification of the place permitted links to be built between Oradour-sur-Glâne and other European locations where mass violence had occurred, based on the shared rhetoric of innocent victims (Farmer, 2007: 237). From that point on, the Oradour site of memory opened up to other memories and discourses, thanks to the work carried out by the Center, which organized, among other things, temporary exhibitions.

Thus it was that, almost ten years after the museum was opened, between June 27th, 2008 and May 5th, 2009, the Center of Memory mounted an exhibition of 20 panels, on loan from the Gernika Peace Museum, entitled “The war in Spain, Gernika”. It was accompanied by another 21 panels putting into context the war in Spain and Spanish exile in France.⁴ The holding of the exhibition was justified on grounds of the similarities between events at the two locations: “the massacre of civil populations” and “the absence of military objectives”.⁵ Moreover, the press pack accompanying the exhibition made a further connection between the French people and the Spanish Civil War:

The bond between Oradour and the war in Spain is also forged on the very soil of Oradour-sur-Glâne. Spanish

refugees were received after January 1939. These were Spanish republicans who had fled after the victory of Franco's troops. The authorities assembled them in a Foreign Workers' Group (GTE), which existed in the municipality until 1942. Finally, of the 642 victims of the Oradour massacre, 18 were people of Spanish origin who lived in the village.

The two villages, then, not only share in a message of exemplary memory but are also linked by the overlapping histories derived from the transnational movement of people caused by the wars of the twentieth century. Genika and Oradour saw themselves reflected in the mirror of arbitrary violence towards civilian populations, and updated the message given out by their respective museums: a message of universal peace to prevent such tragedies from ever being repeated (Boursier, 2005). In addition, the exhibition also rendered more visible the case of the Spanish victims who had fled as war refugees. Despite this, little was known about these Spanish refugees who died in Oradour. Indeed, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin*, newly created when the exhibition opened, immediately declared its desire that more should be discovered about these refugee victims.

THE SPANISH REFUGEES OF ORADOUR-SUR-GLANE

The associative interests regarding the site of memory are diverse in nature (Macé and Léger, 2014). The first proposal came from the treasurer of *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin*, Palmira Desseix, who had participated in the creation of the second part of the aforementioned temporary exhibition. She suggested restoring a commemorative tombstone donated by the *Junta Española de Liberación* (JEL) featuring the names of the victims (Fig. 1). At the time, the association ran up against two major problems. The first was that 20 victims were listed on the tombstone whereas, according to another more recent tablet, 18 Spanish refugees had actually died (Fig. 2). This was because, when the JEL tombstone was engraved, between 1944 and 1945 (the JEL disappeared in 1945), an official list of victims had not yet been drawn up.

The second problem was that, within the main body of the association, there was no one who had been acquainted with the victims or knew anything about them.⁶ It turned out that, almost 70 years after the massacre, no trace of the Spanish victims could be found, except fluc-



FIGURE 1: Tombstone placed by J.E.L. between 1944 and 1945. Oradour-sur-Glane cemetery. Photograph by Eva Léger – June 2011

tuating and misspelt first and family names. Devoid of any communicative or associative memory, their history had not been retrieved by historians either. Indeed, Sarah Farmer, who researched the memorial processes of Oradour, wrote, in the final note of her study that it was only

at the end of the book when she realized that, of those who died in Oradour, she knew almost nothing about the people who were not part of the village community (2007: 236). In her research, she revealed that the Spanish victims were mainly the families (wives and children) of the



FIGURE 2: Spaniards disappeared in Oradour, tombstone based on the official list. Oradour-sur-Glane cemetery. Photograph by Eva Léger – June 2011

Spanish workers enrolled in the 643rd Foreign Workers' Group (GTE) of Oradour-sur-Glane (1940-1942). While archives give some clues as to the reasons for these families being in Oradour and the surrounding hamlets, reference is only made to the men in exile, while most of the Spanish victims of the massacre were in fact women and children (two men, five women, eleven children). When he was also doing research into the 643rd GTE, Jean-Jacques Fouché classified the refugees as "people passing through", "whose history would remain in oblivion because their destination was inscribed in other territories" (2010: 203).

The village of Oradour is often present, indeed omnipresent, in the accounts and testimonies of descendants of the Spanish exile who continued living in the region of Limousin. The image they present of Oradour is that of a memory prior to the tragedy, but into which traces of the subsequent massacre are intertwined. In his story, Gérard del Pozo, whose father worked for the 643rd GTE, refers to how lucky his father was not to have been in the village that day.⁷ As a child, Raimundo Tejedor lived in Oradour-sur-Glane between 1940 and 1942 and went to the village school. His time spent there, two years before the slaughter, is central to his account.⁸ The reference to the site of memory of Oradour-sur-Glane allows him to attest to his own drama—that of a child in exile, snatched out of childhood and away from more privileged social background by the Spanish Civil War (Léger, 2014: 267-272).

As to the exile in Oradour, we can distinguish between two clearly differentiated accounts: one refers to all the Spanish refugees and exiles, while the other refers only to the Spanish victims of the massacre.

In 2013, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* came up with a project to place a commemorative stele in the hamlet of La Fauvette, where the 643rd GTE was based, indicating that Spanish exiles were "interned" there between 1940 and 1942. The association chose to reclaim the memory of the foreign workers exploited by the Vichy regime, for four main reasons. The first was that the association's project was part of a desire to restore "historical truth". This is apparent in its statutes, which clearly express the desire to "fight against the deficiencies and falsifications of History".⁹ *Ateneo Republicano* also took on the role of disseminator of the history of Spanish exiles in France and that of a "people's university":¹⁰ indeed, academic researchers take part in most of its public initiatives, including its annual conference in April. The second reason is part of the associative discourse that denounced the pitiable conditions in which refugees were detained in 1939 in the concentration camps in Southern France, and their subsequent exploitation by the French State, hence the association's rhetoric of internment to describe their enforced inclusion in the GTEs (Léger, 2014: 159). The third reason involves shared memory inside the association. As members of the association whose parents were part of the 643rd GTE, Gérard del Pozo and Raimundo Tejedor embodied the presence of Spanish exiles in the "martyred village". Raimundo Tejedor died in early 2012 and the initiative of placing the stele attesting

to the presence of the 643rd GTE emerged as a posthumous tribute to this child of the exile by the "affective community" that had developed inside the association (Léger, 2014: 492-495). The final reason was that the victims, although part of the identified group in exile in Limousin, were not part of the group developed inside the association, and were therefore not part of this affective community themselves.

In any case, the dominant account of events in Oradour-sur-Glane is that of the victims of the massacre. In the memory of the exile, more than the refugees as such, it has been the Spanish victims who have so far been most visible, since their names were engraved on the list of victims, both in the literature dealing with the tragedy and on the various commemorative tombstones. This record, however, contains a paradox: by being included in an account of a peaceful French village, they were rendered invisible in the global community of victims and their specificity as foreign victims went unmentioned (Farmer, 2007: 243). By seeking to recover them today, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* decided to concentrate mainly on the men in exile, namely the GTE workers. The few historical studies (based on Vichy administration archives) reappropriated by the group and the shared memory inside the association had the effect of producing a male-dominated memory, even though most of the victims of the massacre were actually women and children.

In an attempt to reclaim the victims' full identities and by cross-referencing names with archives, I have been able to reconstruct a list of victims, where possible, with two complete surnames and the most probable spelling (Table 1). Four families were affected by the massacre: the Gil Espinosa family from Alcañiz and Barcelona (four victims), the Pardo Guirao family from Murcia (six victims), the Masachs family from Sabadell (two victims), and the Téllez family from Zaragoza and Barcelona (five victims). However, little information about these victims can be found in the police or administrative archives dating from that time. Since it was the men who were most suspect and most closely watched by the authorities of the day, most of the data refers to them. The two men who were killed in the massacre, José Serrano Robles and Juan Téllez Domínguez, were identified by the authorities as Republican refugees answerable to the 643rd GTE. By contrast, the women and children, precisely because they were women and children, appear in the archives today only as the workers' wives and children. Consequently, both in the historical account and in the public account produced by the association, the past existence of those women and children is limited to two categories: that of victims and "wife of" or "son/daughter of", in other words, people who depend on their relationship to the dominant figure of husband or father.

With the recovery of the exile memory by *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* through research on the GTE, the figures of the victims of the massacre of Oradour attracted the interest of another historical memory association from Spain. After a visit to the ruins of Oradour-sur-Glane in April de 2013, organized by *Ateneo Republicano*

TABLE 1. List of the Spanish victims of the massacre of Oradour-sur-Glane

Family names	First name	Date of birth	Place of birth
ESPINOSA (wife of Joaquín GIL EGEA)	Francisca	16/10/1895	Alcañiz
ESPINOSA JUANOS	Carmen	6/09/1914	Barcelona
GIL ESPINOSA	Francisca	5/09/1929	Alcañiz
GIL ESPINOSA	Pilar	5/09/1929	Alcañiz
LORENTE PARDO	Nuria	28/09/1935	Barcelona
MASACHS	Angelina	22/08/1936	Sabadell
MASACHS	Emilia	9/02/1933	Sabadell
PARDO GUIRAO (wife of Francisco LORENTE PRIOR)	Antonia	4/04/1915	Murcia
PARDO GUIRAO (wife of José SERRANO ROBLES)	María	12/12/1913	Murcia
SERRANO PARDO	Armonia	4/06/1941	Limoges
SERRANO PARDO	Esther	8/08/1943	Limoges
SERRANO PARDO	Francisco	8/08/1943	Limoges
SERRANO ROBLES	José	3/05/1915	Purchena
TÉLLEZ	Armonia	19/10/1936	Barcelona
TÉLLEZ DOMÍNGUEZ	Juan	14/01/1899	Zaragoza
TÉLLEZ	María	15/08/1913	San Feliu de Llobregat
TÉLLEZ	Miquel	22/01/1933	Barcelona
TÉLLEZ	Llibert	24/08/1942	Limoges

du Limousin and with survivor Robert Hébras as guide, *Foro por la Memoria de Guadalajara* developed a series of initiatives that brought the “Oradour case” to Spain.

Immediately after his trip to Limousin, Pedro García Bilbao, Professor of Sociology at the Rey Juan Carlos University in Madrid and President of the Guadalajara memory association published a report of this moving visit on his blog, entitled “In memory of the victims of Oradour-sur-Glane. *Foro por la Memoria* associations visited the village of Oradour and expressed their solidarity with Robert Hébras”.¹¹ In the article, the author recalls the tragedy of Oradour-sur-Glane and refers to the Spaniards among the victims, overvaluing their number (they become “at least 21” to “25 Spanish refugees”). A parallelism between the lethal trail of *Das Reich* division in France and Castejón’s Column in Spain lead him to associate the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War and underscore the exactions of Franco’s army in the light of the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre: “this genuine death march caused fewer civilian victims than the advance to Badajoz and Talavera on Yagüe’s orders of Castejón’s Column in July-August 1936”. The JEL tombstone is presented as the singular expression of an institutional tribute by Republican Spain to the Spanish victims of Oradour-sur-Glane, while democratic Spain remained silent. García Bilbao also recalls the Bordeaux trial in 1953 in a paragraph entitled “Impunity also in France”, which he

puts in the context of militant action in Spain today against the impunity of Francoist crimes. He goes on to emphasize the exemplary aspect of the site: the conservation of the ruins, the museumification, the academic competence of the director of the Center of Memory and the visits paid to the site by schoolchildren.

The presence at the Oradour ruins of members of *Foro por la Memoria*, guided by survivor Robert Hébras, made them privileged witnesses. Having crossed the border and seen the site of memory *in situ*, they were then able to report on the tragedy and the way in which its memory had been preserved in order to bring it into the Spanish memorial setting. The use of the affective register to refer to the relationships between the village population and the Spaniards, who are presented as “companions” and “siblings”, portray the victims as united in their innocence against the impunity of Nazi barbarism. Indeed, appeal to the Bordeaux trial, with the perpetrators of the massacre absent, enables Francoist and Nazi crimes to be considered on a par. At the same time, the overvaluation of the number of victims and the references to the Spanish Civil War, would appear to represent a search for legitimacy in the field of mass violence, since the victims’ discourse becomes more powerful in Spain when the victims of Francoism are compared to those of Nazi barbarism (Michonneau, 2009: 25). The Spaniards who died in Oradour are therefore as much victims of Francoism as

they are of Nazism. Indeed, the discursive strategy is to unite victims in death, using an affective register, making them victims of one and the same cause. As García Bilbao says:

Each and every one of the victims, wherever they may have been from, French or Spanish, Jewish or Gentile, adult or child, when we see the photos or read the names, see their ages, girls and boys, babies killed or burned by Fascist hatred, move us to the same extent. Visitors' hearts are seized by an immense pain which reaffirms them in one conviction: all of them, all these victims are ours too, they are also our siblings, our parents, our children, whatever their nationality, religion or ideas. They are our companions.

This recent reappropriation of the drama, taking it into the universal dimension, is this time happening in Spain, with reference to both the Spanish and the French victims, united in death against Fascism. This narrative is part of a strategy whereby civil society appeals to the institutions by pointing to memory policies in other countries (Baby, 2013: 31). The names engraved in the cemetery allow *Foro por la Memoria* to show that in Oradour-sur-Glane, French institutions had respect for the Spanish victims who died both as a result of Nazism and Francoism. But by bringing the victims together in a homogeneous group, their specificities are erased, as too are the diverse paths they had taken prior to the massacre.

THE 70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE MASSACRE

On the 26th of April 2014, for the day of its annual conference, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* decided to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the tragedy of Oradour-sur-Glane. Specialists in the subject were invited to talk, among other things, about the Spanish presence in Oradour-sur-Glane.¹² Pedro García Bilbao was also invited to present an overview of the “Oradour case”. He first presented a video (which had been projected twelve days earlier at *Ateneo Republicano de Madrid*) on April 25th, showing an audiovisual report of the visit to the ruins one year earlier. At his lecture on April 26th, he underscored the need to take the “Oradour case” to Spain. The comparison of Oradour with other episodes of mass violence, such as those that took place in Spain and Czechoslovakia, allowed the author to reflect on justice related questions and go on to ask which elements fall under the scope of war crimes and which can be considered crimes against humanity. By emphasizing the significance of returning humanity to the victims, García Bilbao was seeking a way to transform cases considered war crimes into crimes against humanity, which would involve legal reparation, in this case, towards a memory of the “Republican side”, traumatized by the war and almost 40 years of dictatorship.

In principle, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* and *Foro por la Memoria* have coincided on a number of issues since the French association became involved, in the wake of Garzón's trial, in the movement against the impu-

nity of Francoist crimes.¹³ However, in the case of the Oradour-sur-Glane memory, their interests differed. While one side was concerned to apply the figures of the victims to the Spanish legal or political context, the other sought to recover the history of their ancestors in Oradour prior to the massacre. For *Foro por la Memoria*, Oradour is a means to an end, while at the same time, it represents a refuge in Limousin for exiles' descendants. For the French association, this site of memory brought to the fore recollections hidden behind the memory of the massacre, including those of the 643rd GTE, and for them, the preservation of the ruins guaranteed the safeguarding of this past. As the last witnesses of the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War pass away, one of the descendants' concerns has been to preserve the memory of their forebears who are no longer there (Léger, 2014: 492-518).

Shortly before the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the massacre, relatives of the Spanish victims from Catalonia approached the Center of Memory and *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin*. The temporal and spatial distance that separated them from this memory was huge: while in France, since 1945, the victims had been remembered every year, their memory had remained prohibited in a Spain that had been crushed, first by the dictatorship, and then by the weight of the silence of the Transition.

It was only in 2010, on the initiative of her son, that Asunción, niece of Antonia and María Pardo Guirao, who both died at Oradour-sur-Glane, felt she had a legitimate right to try to discover more about the fate of her aunts on the Internet. Asunción found a preserved site of memory, with a museum and commemorative tombstones containing the names, albeit inaccurate, of her relatives. As part of a temporary exhibition given over to “Faces of the victims”¹⁴ of Oradour-sur-Glane, Sandra Gibouin, the museum's documentalist, expressed the wish that the biography of a Spanish refugee should be included. Thanks to what Asunción remembered, it was possible to reconstruct for the exhibition the path which the two aunts had taken from Spain to Oradour, giving them an existence that went beyond their condition as victims of the massacre.

Asunción's aunts, both originally from Murcia, had migrated with their parents and brothers to Barcelona in a bid to improve their economic situation. The family's five children worked in factories in the textiles, metallurgy and chemical industries. Shortly afterwards, their father died. Antonia met Francisco Lorente Prior in the Catalan capital and married him in 1933, after which they opened a shop. They had two children, Francisco and Nuria. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Antonia's mother and siblings took refuge in their native village of Esparragal in Murcia, leaving Antonia with her husband and children in Barcelona. A few months later, her sister María decided to return to Barcelona to help her look after the children, as her brother-in-law Francisco Lorente was often away from home, owing to his commitment to the Republican side. By the end of the war, the two sisters, María and Antonia, Francisco and their children had taken refuge in France, from where they wrote to the family that had stayed in Spain. In Esparragal, their correspond-

ence was opened by Francoist police, leading to continuous threats and intimidation by the Spanish administration which was searching for Francisco Lorente. In 1941, Francisco was recruited by the 643rd GTE in Oradour-sur-Glane. The family settled in the hamlet of La Fauvette, close to the headquarters of the workers' group. María married José Serrano Robles there in 1941 and had three children, Armonia, Esther and Francisco. Antonia and María's families heard about the decimation of their relatives on the news. The only survivor was Francisco Lorente Prior, who had been working away from the village on June 10th, 1944. After spending time at the hospital in Limoges for the shock he suffered because of the massacre, he went into exile in Argentina.

The history of this family and its reconstruction is a specific example of how Oradour, with its ruins preserved over the course of time and as an exemplary and institutionalized site of memory, has also allowed the retracing of the course taken by individual lives through the testimonies of relatives on both sides of the Pyrenees.

The initiatives mentioned above relating to the 70th anniversary of Oradour-sur-Glane triggered interest in the press. For the first time, a local newspaper, *Le Populaire*, dedicated full-page articles to the Spanish victims in Tulle and Oradour-sur-Glane. Two Spanish journalists who had been present at the function organized by *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* on the 26th of April, broadcast reports on the Spanish victims on *Onda Madrid* radio station and in the Catalan newspaper *L'Avui*.¹⁵ This would seem to have marked the start of a new stage in the memory of the Spanish exile, both in Limousin and in France in general, generated by the presence of exile memory associations at different commemorative events. The celebrations of the Liberation of Paris, where flags of the Second Spanish Republic were flown, and the presence at the Oradour commemorations of a standard bearer of *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* have given them back a presence in the public realm and rendered them visible at national ceremonies (Macé and Léger, 2014). This presence at the events to commemorate 1939-1945 in Limousin is the result of present-day determination, on the part of descendants of the exiles, to incorporate their family past into the local and national account of the Second World War. Rather than a traumatic past, the existence of *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* and its actions are the expression of a "wounded memory" (Ricoeur, 2000: 150), set apart from major hegemonic accounts anchored in a national vision of the past, while descendants locate the space of their family memory and their feeling of belonging among different territories (Léger, 2014: 312-379).

CONCLUSION

Oradour-sur-Glane is both a place of memories and of reappropriation of the past. The preserved, visible, unchanging ruins have become a symbol of the expression of universal peace in its different temporalities: family mourning in a site of local memory, the symbol of national unity against Nazi barbarism and a message of uni-

versal peace in a transnational setting. On the one hand, the ruins set the scene for a renewed Franco-German reconciliation with the visit of the German and French presidents, Joachim Gauck and François Hollande on September 4th, 2013. On the other, the recent links between the memories of the Spanish Civil War and the massacre of June 10th, 1944, through Gernika, have allowed the Center of Memory to include part of the Spanish past in its account. Consequently, through the museum, the institutions are creating a European narrative of mass violence and, gradually, links between different martyr locations in Europe.

Associative interests surrounding the Spaniards of Oradour-sur-Glane are rooted, both in France and in Spain, in the movements for the recovery of historical memory and the memory of exile (Luzi, 2009). The example set by *Foro por la Memoria de Guadalajara* and *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* in Oradour-sur-Glane, shows that these associative movements, already heterogeneous in their own countries, pursue different goals. The use of the paradigm of victims enables *Foro por la Memoria* to bring the Oradour case into the Spanish legal and political context. For its part, *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* has taken on the historical account of the 643rd GTE, while at the same time pointing out the deficiencies in this history in the light of a shared memory in a specific associative space. Belated historical research on the foreigners in the martyred village, brought to the fore a foreign presence that had previously been diluted within the national account of an innocent French village confronted with Nazi barbarism. By highlighting the reasons they were there, the refugees are also reinstated into a political past which the category of victim alone has tended to erase by placing the focus on the violence of the executioners.

The preserved site of Oradour-sur-Glane permits, in itself, the reappropriation of this past by exiles' descendants, while at the same time, they are contributing other accounts about life in exile in the vicinity of the village. Having been hidden for so many years behind a local or national memory of the massacre, the memory of the Spanish refugees in Oradour-sur-Glane can be considered symptomatic of the memory of exiles in Limousin and in France. It is part of the historical process of immigration in France in which the national dimension tends, in principle, to leave out the "foreign" element, which would, in this case, explain the descendants' feeling of "battered roots" (Noiriel, 1988: 214).

Oradour-sur-Glane shows us that the memory of the Spanish exile is, indeed, a "wounded memory" (Ricoeur, 2000: 150) on several different levels. Firstly, it is wounded by being a "foreign" memory in France, with the exiles kept out of the hegemonic discourse of a French national memory related to the Second World War. It is wounded, too, by the lack of attention paid to immigration in France, even in the history of the nation (Noiriel, 1988: preface I). It is wounded again because present-day memory of the exile is dominated by the military representations of war and the image of intellectuals and male

figures, whereas in Limousin, most of the refugees were firstly women and children, and secondly exiles from working-class or rural backgrounds (Saenz, 2004).

The exiles involuntarily communicated to their children the wound inflicted by their defeat in Spain and the impossibility of return (Guilhem, 2005). Their descendants in France are fighting both for their parents' memory and for recognition as part of a Spanish nation from which their parents were excluded.¹⁶ The memory of the descendants of exiles in Limousin emerges as an affective memory, a tribute to forebears who are no longer there and who struggled in France to bestow upon their children both political awareness and a decent social situation, and whose past these descendants wish to see written into the local narrative of the Second World War. The tombstone in tribute to the workers of the 643rd GTE draws attention to the memory of the Spanish refugees who lived in the village before the massacre. The selection made by the association between historical data and shared memory produces an account dominated by the male figures of the Spanish exile who were poorly treated on arrival in France. However, the act of marking the site of memory offers descendants chance to preserve at least an account of the Spanish republican exile in Limousin, and consequently some reparation for their wounded memory. A site of institutionalized memory, now constantly resignified, Oradour-sur-Glance is the repository of both family memories and of European associative, political and institutional interests.

NOTES

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the association *Ateneo Republicano du Limousin* for opening their doors to me during four years of research and to Sandra Gibouin, information officer at the Center of Memory of Oradour-sur-Glance, for the valuable data and materials provided throughout my research. Many thanks go to Sara Varela Mestre and Marije Hristova for their relevant corrections and suggestions when writing this article.
2. On 9 June 1944, in the repression of Resistance fighters who had liberated the city of Tulle, SS Division *Das Reich* hanged 99 men and deported another 149 to Dachau, of whom 48 survived. See Soulier, 1971.
3. A mere search on Google of the names of the Spanish victims still led, in June 2013, to its website.
4. The temporary exhibition was organized in partnership with *Fundación Museo de la Paz de Gernika*, the *Conseil Général de Haute-Vienne*, the University Library for Contemporary International Documentation (BDIC) in Nanterre and *Secours Populaire* association.
5. See press pack accompanying the exhibition: the exhibition was curated by the Center's director Richard Jezierski and designed by a scientific, educational and documentation team comprising: Stéphanie Boutaud, Sandra Gibouin, Pascal Plas, Michèle Faure, Joanne Théate and Palmira Desseix.
6. With the exception of Raimundo Tejedor who, as a child, had lived in the village where his father was drafted into the 643rd GTE (Foreign Workers Group) from 1941 to 42. He had only vague memories of the children he saw in the school.
7. Interview with Gérard del Pozo on the 2nd and 10th of May 2011 in Limoges, by Eva Léger.
8. Interviews with Raimundo Tejedor on the 15th, 16th and 22nd of October 2009 in Bonnac-la-Côte by Eva Léger with Paloma León, Maxime Jouy and Jesús Alonso Carballés.

9. See the Association's statutes on its blog: <http://ateneodulimousin.canalblog.com/archives/2008/05/07/12302090.html>. [accessed 5/September/2014].
10. Expression used by Jean-Louis Schmitt, Association Secretary, in an interview on the 4th of May 2011 with Eva Léger.
11. Article of April 2013, available on the association's website: www.memoriaguadalajara.es/. [accessed 8/September/2014].
12. The presentation was made by Sandra Gibouin, documentalist at the Center of Memory and myself.
13. See his blog under tab: "Contre l'impunité des crimes franquistes": [accessed 12/September/2014].
14. Temporary exhibition "Oradour, visages" from the 21st of June 2014, organized by the Center of Memory of Oradour-sur-Glance and the National Association of the Families of the Martyrs: www.oradour.org/fr/content/oradour-visages. [accessed 12/September/2014].
15. *Le Populaire [LP]* "L'histoire renouée de la famille Pastor", "Vaincus du franquisme et victimes du nazisme", 3 June 2014: 3. *Onda Madrid [OM]*, 8 June 2014. *L'Avui [LA]* "Catalans en l'horror nazi", 10 June 2014.
16. In response to their parents' exclusion from Spanish society, a number took "binationality" (Ribert and Tur, 2012).

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