

**Song, H. Rosi (2016). *Lost in Transition. Constructing Memory in Contemporary Spain*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 212**

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The account of Spain's transition to democracy that emerges from the pages of Rosi Song's book *Lost in Transition: Constructing Memory in Contemporary Spain* is rather disturbing. The author, through selective yet wide-ranging readings of a variety of texts/media (fiction, TV series, films, manipulated pictures) stresses a puzzling version of that period. Moreover, she focuses on a very short time period, the years between the death of the dictator in 1975 and the remaking (or revamping or recreation) of a new democracy with the first PSOE government in 1982. The *sexenio liberal* came to an abrupt ending and major adjustments were imposed by force (nonetheless a *coup d'état* on February 23, 1981). Major adjustments were made in the way that nationality issues were to be dealt with in the brand new Spain (*estado de las autonomías*) under the umbrella of a new very restrictive law, the infamous LOAPA (*Ley Orgánica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico*).

Song's thesis is that there is an intimate connection and a clash between the celebratory memory of Spain's political shift (which can be read as a forgetting of the true nature of the transition to democracy) and the narratives of Spain's on-going financial and political crisis. She believes that «the narrative of Spain's political transformation has been under scrutiny since the 1980s», but «it is only now that the foundational pieces of this triumphant story are being challenged directly» (p. 2). In the book, the term 'project' refers to the nature of the undertaking of these memories. These are recollections that are carefully planned and broken down into details, with the goal of achieving a particular objective. The projects recreate conditions that facilitate the possibility of experiencing the past *in the present* through 'affect', intimate connection, or as an extension of one's self or one's current circumstances. The book examines several challenges to a triumphant narrative of the Transition through a close reading of recent films, television series, and novels that revisit the political period of Spain's transformation from a dictatorship into a democracy. Song relates the memories narrated and represented in these works from what she calls a 'memory project' in which a generation of writers, filmmakers, and TV producers born in the sixties and early

seventies revisit this period in an effort to capture and narrate the experience of political change. The author characterizes these memories as 'projects' because of the way the *Transición* is perceived: «as an open question or a conundrum to be solved individually and collectively» (p. 2). Song claims rightfully that this is a chapter in Spanish history that it is unfinished and misunderstood.

Song starts the first of the book's five chapters, «Transitional memories», with a review of recollections of the transition years stressing their 'structure of feeling'. Next she examines the debate over the 2007 Law of Historical Memory claiming that memory in Spain has been forced into private spaces. The concept of 'affect' is introduced as a general framework for examining how these memories are produced and how they endure socially and culturally. «Ordinary Memories: Feeling the Past» focuses on how memory is constructed not for its referentiality towards a historical event but rather for its emotional content and affective structure. «The Moment of Memory» provides readings of Javier Cercas's non-fiction essay *Anatomía de un instante* (2009); two TV miniseries, *23-F: El día más difícil del Rey* (2009), *23-F: Historia de una traición* (2009); and a film adaptation of the event, *23-F: La película* (2011). The author sustains that the 23-F has been transformed into a sign, a Peircean index that sustains multiple significations. Song includes insightful comments on a mock documentary about the 1981 *putsch*, *Operación Palace*. Aired in 2014 and conducted by Jordi Évole, it sparked wide controversy on the dangers of manipulating the past.

«Mediating Memory (or Telling How It Happened)» examines an extremely popular television series *Cuéntame cómo pasó* (2001-) and *La chica de ayer* (2009). The first one has been running for fifteen years. Both are good examples of how the past is transformed into a memory project to be narrated, remembered, and recreated. They also illustrate the important role that contemporary media plays today in shaping our views of the past and our memories of historical events. Song also highlights the way popular culture mediates our affective relationship with the past, borrowing from the concept of 'media memory'. It incorporates the senses of *media* (i.e. mass media) and *mediation*, the term 'media memory' speaks to exploration of collective pasts that are narrated through popular forms of communication such as newspapers, television, radio.

In the final chapter, «Transitional Stories», Rosi Song scrutinizes four novels about the *Transición* published in 2011. These are books written by authors born between 1960 and 1963 that experienced that period at an early age: Benjamín Prado's *Operación Gladio* (2011), Ignacio Martínez de Pisón's *El día de mañana*, Antonio Orejudo's *Un momento de descanso*, and Rafael Reig's *Todo está perdonado*. In a close reading of these novels, she considers new ways of analysing this continued obsession with the past. They are a generational response to the experience of the *Transición*. Song convincingly shows that these novels can be read as

an act of remembering but also as a structure of affect that produces a particular relationship with the past, thus demanding a new reading of the familiar stories and known critical perspectives on Spain's political transformation and the country's relationship with its troubled past. Song chooses not to focus on the critical views these works may express about the politics of the *Transición*. She is interested instead in examining their positioning towards the past. In general, she does not pay attention either to important political events of the time, such as the tension between the central government of Spain and its culturally and linguistically diverse regions, or the rising of a gender oriented movement that was one of the many transformations of the period.

This an excellent book. In the introduction, Song claims that the written and visual texts analyzed in her book expose how the years of the political transition represents an unfinished (or not quite understood) chapter in Spanish history. After a careful reading of the book one has even more questions than before starting it. These are sound doubts provoked by a thoughtful reflection. As Montaigne put it: «Philosopher, c'est douter». If narratives about the Spanish civil war are the equivalent of *Western* films in U.S. culture, indisputably narratives on the *transición* are its *film noir*. With many shadows, sinister plots, shady characters, chaos and confusion. And very little hope.

