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**TITLE:** Like Mother, Like Daughter?: Generational Memory and Dialogue in Josefina Aldecoa's Historical Memory Trilogy

**AUTHOR:** Sarah Thomas

**AFFILIATION:** New York University

**ABSTRACT:** Josefina Aldecoa's trilogy of historical memory—*Historia de una maestra* (1990), *Mujeres de negro* (1994) and *La fuerza del destino* (1997)—traces the personal and political experiences of a mother and daughter during the most pivotal period in Spain's contemporary political history: the years spanning the Second Republic, Spanish Civil War, Franco dictatorship, and the nation's transition to democracy. Against the backdrop of these tumultuous political events, Aldecoa constructs a complex portrait of a mother and daughter, two women struggling not only to understand the events unfolding around them, but also to understand one another. This essay demonstrates how, in representing the women's generational differences and attempts to overcome them, Aldecoa creates an intergenerational dialogue, bridging the gaps not only in memory and its transmission, but also between generations.

**KEYWORDS:** Josefina Aldecoa, memory, postmemory, mothers and daughters, Francoism, generationality

**RESUMEN:** La trilogía de la memoria histórica de Josefina Aldecoa—*Historia de una maestra* (1990), *Mujeres de negro* (1994) y *La fuerza del destino* (1997)—sigue la experiencia personal y política de una madre e hija durante una época fundamental en la historia política contemporánea de España: los años que abarcan la Segunda República, la Guerra Civil, la dictadura franquista, y la transición a la democracia. Usando estos eventos tumultuosos como telón de fondo, Aldecoa construye un complejo retrato de una madre e hija, dos mujeres que intentan entender no sólo los eventos pasando alrededor suyo, sino también entenderse entre sí. El presente ensayo demuestra cómo, al representar las diferencias generacionales de las dos mujeres y sus esfuerzos para superarlas, Aldecoa crea un diálogo intergeneracional, zanjando las brechas no sólo de la memoria y su transmisión, sino también entre generaciones.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Josefina Aldecoa, memoria, posmemoria, madres e hijas, Franquismo, generacionalidad

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**BIOGRAPHY:** Sarah Thomas is a Ph.D. candidate in the New York University Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Her doctoral dissertation, "Imagining Otherwise: Childhood, Subjectivity, and the Violent Past in Spanish Film, 1970-1983," examines the figure of the child and idea of childhood in five films of Víctor Erice and Carlos Saura that emerged at the end of the Franco dictatorship and during Spain's transition to democracy.

## Like Mother, Like Daughter?: Generational Memory and Dialogue in Josefina Aldecoa's Historical Memory Trilogy

Sarah Thomas, New York University

Marianne Hirsch has developed the concept of postmemory, a theory she applies in particular to the case of children of Holocaust survivors, who themselves did not live through the traumatic events their parents did, but are nonetheless indelibly marked by them.<sup>1</sup> For Hirsch,

postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor received. (Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22)

These children find themselves deeply invested in the stories of their parents, the “narratives that preceded their birth,” despite having not directly lived or experienced them. Hirsch demonstrates the ways in which many such children, like Art Spiegelman in his creation *Maus*, explore their parents’ stories in their art, literature, or critical work. Susan Suleiman has used this theory as a point of departure for her own concept of the “1.5 generation;” that is, “child survivors of the Holocaust, too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews” (277, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> Josefina Aldecoa, author of the historical memory trilogy that serves as the basis of the present analysis, proposed a strikingly similar generational concept in her first foray into literature in post-Franco Spain in 1983. She deemed her own generation,

marked profoundly by their experience of the Spanish Civil War, “*los niños de la guerra*,” defining this group as those who were born between 1925 and 1928 and were therefore 8-11 when the war broke out. For Aldecoa, this is “*la edad de la infancia consciente*,” and despite geographical, class, or ideological differences, she comments, “*vivimos una misma experiencia que nunca hemos olvidado y que, de un modo u otro, nos ha influido a todos*” (*Los niños*, 9). Her so-called historical memory trilogy is without a doubt based concretely on this shared experience as it details a mother’s and daughter’s experience of the pre-war, wartime, dictatorship, and transition to democracy in Spain. It is interesting that the trilogy is now referred to this way, as in the 1990s when the books were written, the debates ongoing in Spain about historical memory had yet to achieve the potency they now hold (Aldecoa simply referred to it as the trilogy of memory). At the same time, the books are among the first to emerge in what would be a long line of novelized versions of Spain’s recent historical past. One of the novels’ strengths, in the context of this memory boom, is that they focus not only on historical events, but also, more profoundly, on the lives of those who experienced them. The trilogy’s focus on the relationship between mother and daughter is particularly of interest, and demonstrates the complex generational negotiations that play out in the context of civil conflict, repression, exile, and return—events that marked the lives of multiple generations of Spaniards.

The trilogy is chronological, and its fictional details correspond loosely to the events of Aldecoa’s life and her mother’s.

Its first installment, *Historia de una maestra* (1990), is dedicated to Aldecoa's mother and tells what is essentially a fictionalized version of her story—that of a rural schoolteacher who lives for the ideals of the leftist Second Republic in the years leading up to the war. The narration is in the first person, from the point of view of Gabriela (the mother) as she lives through early career difficulties, marriage to a leftist militant, pregnancy, childbirth, and the raising of her daughter, Juana. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that it has been a monologue directed to Juana, who is invited to take up the narration for the second installment, *Mujeres de negro* (1994).<sup>3</sup> In the second novel we see through Juana's eyes as she experiences the wartime years as a young child, as well as her subsequent exile in Mexico, where she lives with her mother through adolescence before returning to Spain to attend university in Madrid. The third novel, *La fuerza del destino* (1997), takes up Gabriela's viewpoint once more for a novel-length interior monologue, as she returns to Spain in the wake of Franco's death and must cope with a changed nation, her challenging relationship to her daughter and to politics, as well as the aging process and her eventual descent into fragility, dementia, and death. This essay explores the dialogue Aldecoa creates in these three novels and its ability to transmit historical and individual memory. Can the daughter voice the mother's story, as well as her own? Can she speak *with* her mother, as opposed to *for* her mother? I hope to show that despite the problems inherent in a fictionalized voicing of the mother, Aldecoa succeeds in creating an intergenerational dialogue of memory. The trilogy attempts to bridge the gaps not only in memory and its transmission, but also between generations. In depicting Gabriela's and Juana's difficulties in relating to one another and differing approaches to political involvement, while nonetheless underscoring their deep care for one another, the trilogy stands as a document of women's experience over generations, against the backdrop of the most important political events of the last century in Spain.

## Personal History as Mode of Transmission

A first question that arises is whether and why a personal—in this case family-based—structure for the transmission of memory is compelling or useful. How can a literary rendering of either postmemory (examination of parental experience) or 1.5 memory (exploration of one's own childhood experience) serve a larger goal of national, collective or universalized memorialization of the trauma of war and displacement? Can the personal serve the political? Aldecoa herself has commented that

Mi propia vida no interesa, pero sí la vida que me ha tocado vivir, en la medida en que mi vida está integrada en la vida de una generación cronológica y al mismo tiempo de una generación literaria. (*Los niños*, 10)

Speaking of the first two novels of Aldecoa's trilogy (prior to the publication of the third one), Sarah Leggott comments that the novels “reveal the interconnectedness of the public and private spheres, as personal familial issues are shown to be intertwined with public political ones” (“History,” 125). Aldecoa purposefully aligns many of the key personal or familial milestones in the two novels with larger historical events—Gabriela receives her teaching diploma on the day that Franco marries his wife; Juana is born on the eve of the election of the Republic; Gabriela's father dies days before the outbreak of the Civil War and her mother at its exact conclusion; Gabriela herself dies on the same day in 1982 that the socialists win the elections, on which Juana has tirelessly worked. This coordination of events serves as a means of foregrounding the personal but with strong reference to the political. Christina Dupláa comments of the trilogy that it is a “personal search [...] that legitimizes a whole lifetime and which is inseparable from Spanish historical and political events of the twentieth century” (72). The close parallelism between the life stories of

the trilogy's fictional characters and the lives of Aldecoa and her mother serves to personalize—and historicize—the material even further.

The trilogy's establishing of a close relationship between personal and political events suggests that the two are inextricably linked; although the trilogy is primarily a personal account, collective and public events take on great importance throughout, situating it in a broader context and tying it to themes beyond the lives of its characters which affect Spanish society as a whole. Writing in a different context, on the *escrache* protests staged by the children of the disappeared in Argentina, Diana Taylor has commented that “by emphasizing the public, rather than private, repercussions of traumatic violence and loss, social actors turn personal pain into the engine for cultural change” (168). In the trilogy, the opposite action serves the same effect; by telling the personalized, private stories of two generations of women from the same family and examining the differences in their viewpoints and experience, Aldecoa brings their unique voices to the fore and creates a sympathetic and moving private portrait within the context of the more public, societal suffering caused by the Civil War and Franco dictatorship—as well as the public debates about historical memory that continue to this day. In the trilogy, we see the difficulties of these two women and those close to them through their own eyes, personalizing the material for the reader rather than broadening it into a generalized or generic picture of wartime suffering. At the same time, Aldecoa's constant foregrounding of these personal experiences against a backdrop of recognizable political events forces the reader to see the personal as always in context of the political. Aldecoa's focus on the personal gives the reader a deeper understanding of the national traumatic past than a merely historical account could; as Sara Brenneis has commented:

History and fiction are intricately fused—not only in Aldecoa's trilogy,

but in so much of Spain's contemporary literature—because the process of reexamining facts and data in order to understand the country's past is still incomplete. (146)

Despite the personal focus of the trilogy, the public, historical, national story it follows is equally present, and enriched by the personal component.

The emphasis on personal—and in particular, women's—experience in the trilogy also seeks to recuperate the experience of those traditionally marginalized or excluded from hegemonic historical discourse. Paul Connerton addresses the significant work of life and oral histories in giving voice to subordinate groups, whose stories do not always figure into the official histories:

Or consider the case of life histories. After all, most people do not belong to ruling élites [...]. For some time now a generation of mostly socialist historians have seen in the practice of oral history the possibility of rescuing from silence the history and culture of subordinate groups. Oral histories seek to give voice to what would otherwise remain voiceless even if not traceless, by reconstituting the life histories of individuals. (18)

Many critics have also spoken of the work of oral or life histories to recuperate women's experience, and today there are countless oral history projects and testimony-based research seeking to recuperate and vindicate women's historical experience.<sup>4</sup> The Spanish context is no exception, as women's stories remained largely silent as the dominant narratives were those of the men actively involved in politics and combat. It is important to note that the pre-war leftist Republic, the setting of the trilogy's first novel, accorded many more rights to women than were available during the war or dictatorship years—for example, divorce, which was legal only during the Republic and again in the 1980s after Franco's death—but still offered limited opportunities

at best for women's advancement (key among them being work as schoolteachers, such as the novels' elder protagonist). Aldecoa's novels give a voice to the everyday experience of women not engaged in the historical events of the day, but inevitably marked by them.

The trilogy does not, strictly speaking, function as an oral history; it may better fit the term "life-writing," but it nonetheless retains elements of oral history or testimonial writing, particularly in the case of *Historia de una maestra*, a first-person narrative spanning a lifetime and directed in the second person at its conclusion to the daughter-interlocutor. Writing on Aldecoa's works, Sarah Leggott has commented that, generally speaking:

for women, life-writing has provided a vehicle for the voicing and preservation of stories and memories that have long been excluded from hegemonic discourses of cultural and collective memories. ("Re-membering Self," 13)

At the close of the novel, after her first-person narration has ended, Gabriela speaks directly to a second person addressee seen only on the first page and never named (as if being interviewed by an oral historian and only acknowledging her presence at the beginning and end of the interview): "Contar mi vida... Estoy cansada, Juana. Aquí termino. Lo que sigue lo conoces tan bien como yo, lo recuerdas mejor que yo. Porque es tu propia vida" (*HM*, 232). Thus in the first novel, Gabriela aligns herself directly with the subject of a life history in summing up the novel as a life-telling ("contar mi vida"), and Juana takes on the outside-the-frame position of the interviewer or receptor of her mother's life history. In adopting the framework of an oral history, Aldecoa's characters work toward precisely what Connerton and others have suggested as the goal of oral history: giving voice to the stories that are marginalized or excluded from official—and predominantly male—historical discourse. The trilogy's second and third novels also give voice to

marginal experience: that of the exile, in the case of *Mujeres de negro*, and of old age, in *La fuerza del destino*. The interplay between the personal story and the official history cannot have escaped Aldecoa, who titles the first novel *Historia de una maestra*, playing with the Spanish resonance and ambiguity between "story" and "history." Thus the personal story of a rural *maestra's* experience of the Civil War, exile in Mexico, and eventual return to grow old in what she calls "un país que no se parece en nada al que dejé" (*FD*, 62) imbricates with and gives another perspective on more depersonalized historical narratives, serving as a dialogue on the experience of two generations during the most tumultuous years of the twentieth century in Spain.

### **Mother-Daughter Transmission: An Outsider Genealogy**

Aldecoa's use of the personal within the historical, then, enriches the trilogy's historical content by imbuing it with personal and familial content, drawing the reader into one family's experience of the war, its aftermath, and the years-later transition to democracy. But what does the trilogy's particular mother-daughter focus achieve? The family in general serves as a rich model for generational transmission of memory, as we see in the example of postmemory, where children feel great investment in the memories of their parents, even though they did not live their experience. Marianne Hirsch has commented that while postmemory as a whole "defines the *familial* inheritance and transmission of cultural trauma;" this framework need not be restricted to the family, but can rather be more broadly applied or borrowed ("Marked by Memory," 77, emphasis added). The familial, then, can serve as a model of transmission for a broader context such as the national (in Spain's case), or even transnational. Here it should be noted that while much of Holocaust-based theory cannot necessarily be directly transposed to the Spanish context for obvious differences



in context and magnitude, certain elements thereof—particularly the idea of postmemorial “belatedness”—seem well-suited to adaptation to the Spanish context. This belatedness also occurs in Spain, where literature dealing with the Civil War and dictatorship could not and did not emerge until long after the conflict’s end, and was often necessarily written by a second generation because of the time that had elapsed. Jo Labanyi has rightfully pointed out, however, that in the Spanish case, such a gap does not necessarily have to do with traumatic blockage but more so with “habits of silence induced by decades of repression and a lack of willing interlocutors” (109). It is worth noting that Aldecoa’s trilogy, and especially the first installment, was one of the first great successes (critically and commercially) of Spain’s belated memory boom of the 1990’s; although Franco died and the dictatorship came to an end in 1975, literature and art did not begin directly dealing with the war and dictatorship for quite some time because of the emphasis on a smooth transition to democracy. So Aldecoa’s family-based framework is not necessarily intended merely to elicit sympathy for her own family’s particular experience of the war, but rather also to bring issues of memorialization of the war, dictatorship, and transition to the attention of the Spanish public at the time of publication.

However, there does seem to be a uniqueness to the mother-daughter bond in the novels’ representation of the generational transmission of memory, based in no small part on gender identity. Hirsch discusses the unique capabilities and risks of the mother-daughter relationship in the transmission of memory, asserting that

[...] the identification between mothers and daughters forms a clear example of how a shared intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, based in bodily connection, can be imagined. Because of a bodily closeness that is reinforced by cultural expectations, the case of mothers and

daughters might indeed acutely exemplify the danger of an over-identification. (“Marked by Memory,” 77)

Because of their common bodily experience, mothers and daughters can share a space of remembrance; at the same time, the dangers of one speaking for the other or eroding her memory are also greater based on the mother-daughter capability for intersubjectivity and identification. Both Gabriela and Juana are only children who have complex relationships with their mothers; however, upon reaching adulthood, these relationships draw from and are strengthened by common female bodily experience (pregnancy, childbirth, maternity) and expectations of gender roles (romantic or sexual relationships, marriage, motherhood, career)—which in Spanish society of the time were, to different degrees in the 1930s and 1970s, rigid and traditional. Gabriela, for example, grows up much closer to her father than her mother, but finds that this alliance shifts once she becomes a mother herself. After Juana’s birth, Gabriela, her mother, and her daughter come to form a female intergenerational triad set apart from their fathers and husbands, who are becoming increasingly enmeshed in the politics of the day. Late in *Historia de una maestra*, Gabriela nostalgically recalls one summer spent at her parents’ house with her young daughter:

Evoco aquel verano y veo el pequeño grupo que formábamos las tres, mi madre, mi hija y yo, unidas en una plácida armonía, voluntariamente aisladas de los insistentes presagios [de guerra] de nuestros hombres. (205)

Gabriela chooses to isolate herself from her largely absent husband and the country’s escalating political tensions to take solace in the female companionship of her own mother, who knows firsthand the bodily experiences Gabriela is living as a new mother. This isolation, although harmonious and voluntary, nonetheless foreshadows the mournful, solitary triad

we see in *Mujeres de negro*, where the three women live together in the capital after the deaths of their husbands/fathers and the outbreak of war, as well as Gabriela's more profound isolation in the final installment, *La fuerza del destino*, which finds her living alone in the suburbs of Madrid, where Juana is too busy with the politics of the day to visit her very often. Gabriela appears to derive most joy from the infrequent visits of Juana's son, her grandson Miguel.

Although in the third novel we have a mixed-gender triad, in the first two installments Aldecoa creates a female genealogy of daughter-mother-grandmother, demonstrating the workings of female familial lineage which she herself enacts and embodies in writing her trilogy. In tracing the experience of three female generations (albeit focusing primarily on two), Aldecoa emphasizes the familial and generational legacy of historical memory through the war, dictatorship, and into the present day. At the same time, a female-only triad focuses the narration particularly onto Spanish *women's* experience in this context; as Sarah Leggott has commented,

[*Mujeres de negro*] focuses even more than the first [installment] on relationships between women as [...] the three generations of women are forced to make a new life for themselves, as is the case for so many Spanish women of the period. ("History," 113, emphasis added)

By tracing a female familial genealogy, Aldecoa also succeeds in tracing the experience of a broader contingent of Spanish women as a whole—a contingent that had typically stood outside the discourse of history, especially at the time of the trilogy's publication. Joseph Roach has commented that "genealogies of performance" work to transmit cultural memory (24); Aldecoa's generational triad accomplishes a similar function in tracing both specific and generalized female experience of the war, showing the ways in which gender identity came into

play as women became increasingly isolated and excluded by the events of the conflict.

## Mother-Daughter Challenges: The "Vexed" Relationship

But despite Aldecoa's construction of female outsider solidarity in her intergenerational construct, the mother-daughter relationship in her novels, as elsewhere, is not always an easy one. Emilie Bergmann, writing of the Spanish postwar context, has commented that:

The maternal role [...] is such a culturally contested space, a notoriously "vexed" category, that it is no surprise that relationships between mothers and daughters are fraught with vexation, guilt, self-loathing and the profoundest love of self and other. (108)

This could be said of mothers and daughters in almost any context, but, as Christine Arkininstall asserts, the dynamic was particularly exacerbated by the traditionalist mores of the Francoist context; it is unsurprising then, that "[u]ntil the late 1970s, representations of mother-daughter relationships in contemporary Spanish literature by women [were] fraught with difficulties" (47). Mothers and daughters, sharing an often problematic gender identity and cultural position, are a topic of much literary and cultural analysis, and many critics have demonstrated the difficulty in constructing the mother as a fully-developed subject rather than an objectified or essentialized stereotype, stumbling block, nag, or nonentity. In her earlier work in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Hirsch demonstrated the ways in which conventional literary representations of women have converted the mother into "either the object of idealization and nostalgia or that which has to be rejected or surpassed in favor of allegiance to a morally and intellectually superior male world" (14). Departing from Adrienne Rich's work in *Of Woman Born*, Hirsch also goes on to explain that even many writings aligned with

feminism demonstrate what Adrienne Rich has called “matrophobia,” wherein “mothers remain in the position of dreaded other, of objects to the daughter’s emerging subjectivity” (Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, 136). Narratives from the point of view of the daughter frequently cast the mother as an obstacle or symbolic of the repressive male order the daughter seeks to escape; narratives that deal with motherhood are rare or superficial, and often written from the daughter’s position. As Hirsch aptly writes:

Feminist writing and scholarship, continuing in a large part to adopt daughterly perspectives, can be said to collude with patriarchy in placing mothers into the position of object—thereby keeping mothering outside of representation and maternal discourse a theoretical impossibility. (163)

Maternal experience lacks representation, and the mother’s voice rarely surfaces in women’s writing, which generally—as in Aldecoa’s case—is constructed by the daughter. For the daughter to speak for the mother risks reifying or silencing her; it is “at once to give voice to her discourse *and* to silence and marginalize her” by speaking for rather than with her (16, emphasis added). How, then, can the mother’s experience be adequately represented?

For a number of critics of the Spanish literary tradition, such as Arkinstall or Emilie Bergmann, the same problems characterize the treatment of the mother figure there. However, although Bergmann acknowledges that representations of the mother have been traditionally “vexed” in Spanish literature, she also asserts these representations are changing (108). Arkinstall, too, comments that the early 1990s “witness a greater impetus to rewrite myths pertaining to mothers and daughters [...]. A more recent development has been a demythification of maternal stereotypes hitherto eschewed” (70). Bergmann attributes this trend to the changing political

climate of the nation: with the political enfranchisement of women in Spain after the demise of the dictatorship, women writers became

able to perceive their mothers in a larger context, beyond that of the family that reproduced a politically and sexually repressive society. This recognition prompted a search for the woman who existed before she became a wife and a mother, particularly when the mother had come of age during the period in the 1930s in which women had the rights of citizenship. (112)

The first installment of Aldecoa’s trilogy undertakes precisely this search, with the double burden of searching for the woman who existed not only before marriage and motherhood, but also before her life was forever changed by the events and losses of the Civil War.

## Representing Maternity, Speaking with the Mother: Aldecoa’s Trilogy

In reconstructing her mother’s possible experience prior to the traumatic break of the war, Aldecoa undertakes a true postmemorial work, attempting to connect to her mother’s inaccessible past. In undertaking such a work by means of a fictionalized version of her mother, Aldecoa approaches this memory in the only way in which she can do it justice; as she does not have direct access to her mother’s memories, she thus approaches them through a creative construction. As Hirsch has stressed in her work on postmemory, this type of memory’s “connection to the past is thus not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (“The Generation,” 107). Aldecoa’s novelistic creation serves, then, as an imaginative projection of what her mother’s experience might have been. Much like *Mujeres de negro* (a recollection of childhood spoken from a posterior viewpoint), *Historia*



*de una maestra* is spoken after the events in question, and serves as a document of recollection. Gabriela comments throughout the trilogy on the challenges and difficulties of memory, commenting for example:

Cuando vivimos sin testigos que nos ayuden a recordar es difícil ser un buen notario. Levantamos actas confusas o contradictorias, según el peso que el tiempo haya dejado en los recuerdos de la memoria. (*HM*, 59)

Memory in the novels, especially the first and last—those told from the mother's perspective—often appears as confusing or contradictory, and the accounts are not always chronological, skipping back and forth to memories within memories. The fluidity of memory gives Aldecoa more room to maneuver when telling a story that is not always her own, as Sarah Leggott has commented: “the protagonists’ rejection of a linear account destabilizes generic norms to contest traditional notions of self and story;” the self, in these novels, can be mother or daughter, or both at once (“Re-membling Self,” 15). Throughout the novel the narrator questions her own memory, drawing the reader's attention to its failings and ambiguities, and to the fact that the novel itself is a fictionalized attempt to access an inaccessible memory—that of the author's mother. The novel's questioning of the very function of memory also serves to mark it as an imaginative or creative attempt at reconstruction, not a definitive account that claims to speak for the experience of another, in her place.

But *Historia de una maestra* not only serves as an imaginative postmemorial projection of maternal memory; it also gives voice to maternal experience, against the difficulties of such representation noted above. Through the use of both inscribing and incorporating representations, Aldecoa gives full weight to Gabriela's maternal experience, creating a maternal narrative of depth and complexity, not essentialization, silencing, or

mere nostalgia.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, it is significant that the novel is spoken in Gabriela's voice—and that this narrative voice differs strongly from that used in the second novel, spoken from Juana's perspective. Secondly, it is essential that the novel valorizes Gabriela's experience as a mother by showing us her life previous to and within motherhood. Of particular importance in the novel is her pregnancy and initial maternal experience, during which she withdraws from the increasingly hostile political context surrounding her. This withdrawal on some level prefigures her distance from political life in the third novel, *La fuerza del destino*. Both are somewhat surprising given her passion for education and equality depicted at the beginning of *Historia de una maestra*, though at least in the concluding novel her apathy is linked to feelings of isolation or uselessness after returning from exile, to be discussed below.

In the first novel, Gabriela's withdrawal and isolation is cast in a very different, even positive light. She consistently describes pregnancy and motherhood as isolating, but positively or even joyfully so, as they provide her an escape from the political situation that threatens the country. Her pregnancy is an experience of pleasant solitude:

Había caído en una indiferencia placentera y serena. El embarazo me alejaba del mundo exterior. Me encontraba escuchándome por dentro, observando el más mínimo cambio dentro de mí. (*HM*, 99)

Her positive experience of isolation continues once the baby is born; early in her motherhood she writes similarly of a tranquil summer spent with her daughter:

Mi vida transcurría ajena de cualquier fenómeno que no fuera el de mi maternidad [...]. aquél fue sin duda el más hermoso y sereno de los veranos. Atrapada voluntariamente en mi papel de madre, prescindía de lo que me rodeaba. (112-113)

Aldecoa privileges Gabriela's bodily experience of maternity as well as her inscriptive experience thereof in writing the narrative to her daughter (to whom we discover it is addressed at its conclusion). Although this representation of bodily experience and plenitude reclaims and exalts female experience—maternity is the most positively described experience in the novel, and Gabriela relishes in the possibility of escape from the political battles closing in on her career and family—Gabriela's enjoyment of being "trapped," even if such entrapment is soothing and voluntary, is somewhat troubling. While it is certainly true that Gabriela's narrative works toward displacing the primacy of the male political sphere and valorizing female experience, this focus is nonetheless problematic inasmuch as it removes her entirely from political action or discourse during the critical pre-war period. Even as the situation becomes increasingly grim, Gabriela does not take a stance, but rather repeats again and again her pacifist stance whenever political matters are mentioned: "no es posible la violencia. Nunca la violencia" (*HM*, 198).

However, this treatment of maternity, though certainly more profound and fully-realized than many, is nonetheless still a projection on the part of the author/daughter, who imbues the mother-daughter relationship previous to her own memory of it with a closeness the two do not share later in life, largely due to the traumatic events of the war. Gabriela's idealized "voluntary entrapment" could be seen as functioning within a sort of "feminist family romance," as critiqued by Hirsch in *The Mother/Daughter Plot*. Hirsch describes this revision of Freud's family romance as one of a "retreat to the pre-oedipal" and "concentration on the mother-daughter bond" (133). Aldecoa projects a happy unity between mother and infant daughter where the two are isolated from the outside world and, in particular, the masculine order of politics and war (it is worth noting that Gabriela's husband, Ezequiel, becomes increasingly

radical and politically active in parallel to his wife's retreat into the domestic sphere and her maternal activities). At the same time, the idealized projection also takes place in a time previous to the traumas of war and the losses Gabriela suffers—both parents, her husband, friends, and career. In this sense, Aldecoa's idealized portrayal of pregnancy and maternity need not be construed as an attempt to romanticize the mother-daughter relationship but rather as a means of recuperating the mother figure as complete and fulfilled in ways she cannot be after the events of the war. Leggott comments that

as hope for a new and different Spain disintegrates in an environment of ever-increasing tension and violence, Gabriela's immersion in her daughter and in her role as mother increases, and in this way Aldecoa foregrounds motherhood and the unique mother-daughter relationship. ("History," 112)

The experience of motherhood is thereby depicted as a valuable and positive experience against a background of violence and hatred. In exploring Gabriela's experience of maternity before the war imposes distance between her and her daughter, Aldecoa recuperates Gabriela's more complete experience and shows her as a fully realized subject, as yet untouched by the losses of the war years.

It is precisely this version of Gabriela that Juana never really gets to know, and she, like many Spaniards, to quote Bergmann again, is prompted to "search for the woman who existed *before*" (112, emphasis added). The installment of the trilogy that perhaps most overtly encapsulates this search is *Mujeres de negro*, the second novel, which operates as a document of 1.5 generation memory or memory of a *niña de la guerra*, whose life autobiographically mirrors that of Aldecoa's generation—though not as directly Aldecoa herself, who did not live in exile as Juana does. Throughout this installment, the reader sees through Juana's eyes, as she struggles through the difficulty of the war years and grapples

with her relationship to a single mother (widowed when her husband is shot on the first day of the war) who struggles to provide for Juana and her own mother after being barred from teaching. Juana's narrative, spoken from a posterior perspective by the adult Juana, reflects on her childhood perception of war-time trauma and the ways in which she did not understand as the adults around her did:

La infancia es un continuo atesorar sensaciones, sentimientos, ideas en estado puro [...]. Pero la infancia puede también ser dolorosa, porque si sobreviene la tragedia, el niño no tiene defensas racionales, no levanta, como los adultos, el escudo de las soluciones posibles. (MN, 26)

Juana senses the fear and concerns of her mother and grandmother, but doesn't have the resources to process them, nor is she treated or spoken to as an adult; as a result she develops a relation to her mother (particularly after the grandmother's death at the end of the war) based in close physical proximity but great emotional distance. Juana sees her mother as distant, withdrawn, marked by her losses during the war. The rupture between them certainly arises because of the trying experiences suffered by Gabriela during the wartime; this is a prime example of the "break in transmission resulting from traumatic historical events" described by Hirsch that "sever[s] the intergenerational memorial fabric" ("The Generation," 110). In this case, not only has a traumatic historical event (the war) caused a break in the transmission of memory—Gabriela never speaks to Juana of it—it also broadens the generational gap between the two women, isolating Gabriela and causing her to withdraw from her daughter.

In *Mujeres de negro*, where we see from the daughter's perspective at a young age, the mother-daughter relationship is often indeed strained. Juana speaks frequently of her mother's attitude as one that shifts generally from disapproval to apathy—confirming the elderly Gabriela's suppositions and

projections in *La fuerza del destino*, where she repeatedly reflects on how the adult Juana wrongfully thinks they are so different: "[Q]ué distintas somos, [Juana] me dice con frecuencia. No exactamente, Juana, le digo. Pero no acaba de creerlo. Me ha visto, desde que nació, bajo esa apariencia triste y sombría" (52). This sad and somber appearance takes center stage during Juana's formative years in *Mujeres*, where Gabriela lives in an interior world, enclosed in her mourning clothes and engrossed in her work as a teacher. In one characteristic scene, when a ten-year-old Juana asks permission to go to Mass with her friends, the irreligious Gabriela seems scarcely to process her daughter's question:

Ella me miró como si estuviera ausente o regresara de un lugar muy lejano. Tardó unos momentos en reaccionar y al fin contestó: 'Haz lo que quieras.' Pero no lo dijo enfadada ni como un reproche, sino como si de verdad no le importara. (MN, 16)

Juana's relationship with her mother in the novel is emotionally distant, as is Gabriela's relationship with Octavio, her second husband. The events of the war and the losses she has suffered have drawn Gabriela into herself. However, despite her mother's distraction and emotional unavailability, Juana depends on her greatly, and is shocked upon Gabriela's remarriage and their move to Mexico by the degree of her dependence:

Por primera vez me di cuenta del cambio que había sucedido en nuestras vidas. El matrimonio de mi madre no significaba sólo una nueva residencia, una forma de vida diferente y más grata, sino una forma nueva también en nuestra relación. Yo estaba acostumbrada a vivir pegada a mi madre, hasta el punto de no haberme separado de ella ni un sólo día en mis diez años. (69-70)

Thus Gabriela and Juana's relationship is above all one of physical proximity and comfort, if not emotional fulfillment. As Juana

grows up through adolescence and young adulthood, she places physical distance between herself and a mother she sees as too stern, old before her time, and inattentive. Juana chooses to study in Mexico City for secondary school (away from Octavio's rural hacienda) and in Spain (where Gabriela has vowed never to return while Franco remains alive) for university. Reflecting later on her move to Spain, Juana comments:

Una reflexión inevitable se interpuso en mis recuerdos: yo me había ido para separarme de mi madre, yo había necesitado dejar atrás la pesadumbre de mi madre, sus trajes negros enlutándola desde tan joven, yo me había ido para vivir sin remordimiento mi propia vida. No era un acto de rebeldía. (176)

Leaving for Spain allows Juana to live her own life on her own terms, in the homeland she left as a young child and barely remembers.

The return to Madrid not only allows Juana to reconnect with her roots after living in exile, but also brings her emotionally closer to her now even more physically distant mother. It is in her independent life in her home country that Juana becomes involved in clandestine political activism and takes up the ideals her mother espoused in her youth—liberty, the importance of education, women's intellectual and career possibilities. Juana ends up embracing the narratives that shaped her early life, even from before her memory of them:

Con paso seguro, me acercaba a los mitos que había alimentado desde mi nacimiento: la lucha por la libertad, la oportunidad perdida, la esperanza siempre mantenida de que un día empezáramos de nuevo. (141)

In her move to gain physical distance from her mother, Juana ends up coming closer to Gabriela's ideas, moving away from the girlish frivolities for which her ever-serious mother had

previously chastised her. In addition to becoming ideologically aligned, Gabriela and Juana also finally become peers and confidantes after Juana experiences a failed love affair. Juana fears confessing the experience to her mother, assuming that she will, as usual, consider her daughter frivolous; but Juana is surprised not only by her mother's response but also by the cathartic function she experiences in writing to her:

tomé una decisión importante: escribiría a mi madre para contarle toda la historia del principio al fin. Estaba segura de que esa carta ejercería una función de limpieza y equilibrio y me liberaría... La respuesta de mi madre no se hizo esperar. Era una carta rebotante de amor y comprensión. (199)

"Comprensión" is a word almost never used by Juana to describe her mother, until these the final pages of the novel, where her mother relates her own romantic experience to console her daughter, granting Juana insight previously unavailable into Gabriela's early life. Juana finally manages to connect with her mother despite the generation gap—further widened by Gabriela's difficult wartime experiences—that stands between them. By returning to Spain and coming into her own, Juana also connects with the woman her mother was before becoming her mother, before the war, before her marriage; she comes, on her own terms, to share her mother's ideological beliefs, and develops a written connection with her based in common female experience.

Undoubtedly, much of the success in this connection derives from the women attaining some level of peer status; Juana is now an adult, with a political consciousness and romantic failures to which her mother can relate. In the trilogy's third installment, however, we see the mother-daughter bond challenged anew as Gabriela must face a new phase of life her daughter cannot fully understand. *La fuerza del destino*, structured as

a long interior monologue that indirectly relates conversations in the present and memories of the past, shows how Gabriela returns to Spain following Franco's death to find herself isolated and adrift, in contrast to her daughter, who is boundlessly active in the new democratic process taking shape in post-Franco Spain. As critics such as Arkinstall have pointed out, the novel is a uniquely nuanced and moving depiction of old age, and the protagonist's descent into Alzheimers holds obvious symbolism in a trilogy of memory. Perhaps most of interest for the present analysis, however, are the ways in which Gabriela finds herself consistently out of place in or at odds with the present-day Spain in which she finds herself. This sensation primarily comes across as a sense of isolation or uselessness, no doubt arising from the circumstances of Gabriela's life; for the first time ever, she is not working or taking care of anyone. Her lack of fulfillment is clear throughout the novel; in contrast to her experience of pregnancy and maternity, the description of her corporeal reality is overwhelmingly negative and defeated:

No me arrepiento de haber vuelto, eso desde luego. Pero la vuelta me ha envejecido. Lo noto, lo siento en todo mi cuerpo. En pocos años he pasado a convertirme en una anciana [...]. He pasado a convertirme en un ser inútil. (FD, 21)

This sense of uselessness pervades Gabriela's experience for the bulk of the novel as she has neither a personal nor professional mission as in the past: "[h]ay un punto en el que la función paterna no es necesaria. ¿Soy yo necesaria a alguien?" (76).

Gabriela's sense of futility or isolation also translates into a double sense of disconnection from the two causes previously most dear to her: her daughter and politics. Her sense of distance from the political events of the day appears directly tied to her experience of old age, as she herself comments midway through the novel: "he vuelto demasiado tarde para incorporarme a la vida activa, para

compartir con los jóvenes la aventura de la libertad" (113). She feels weary and unmoored, asking as well where the nucleus of her life lies after thirty-eight years in Spain and thirty-three in Mexico. In contrast to Juana's energy and involvement—her husband Sergio is working on the new constitution and she is active in the burgeoning Socialist Party—her mother transmits a sense of exhaustion or despondency as concerns the political. Gabriela comments that when Franco died:

Yo no estaba alegre. Demasiado tarde. No me sentía con fuerzas para brindar por Ezequiel, mi marido fusilado el 18 de julio, por nuestros sueños rotos, por mi vida truncada. Era el 20 de noviembre y pocos días antes yo había cumplido setenta y un años. (11-12)

We observe the contrast between mother and daughter, now inverted in their commitments to activism, through Gabriela's perspective, underscoring their differences yet again. Juana appears somewhat naïve in her passion, as Gabriela is shown to have more consciousness of the past, for example in response to Franco's death, or the new efforts of Spanish leftists toward a government and constitution:

Mamá, estamos en el corazón del gran cambio histórico. Tenemos que colaborar. Es muy fácil criticar sin hacer nada. Hay que comprometerse. Yo asiento y trato de convencerme de que [Juana y el esposo] están en lo cierto. Retrocedo en el tiempo a aquellos años nuestros, a aquella España que viví cuando era joven, antes de que el exilio me convirtiera en un fantasma. (13)

A veces, cuando les oigo hablar les digo: Me doy cuenta de lo jóvenes que sois, históricamente quiero decir. Porque los que andáis en el juego político no habéis vivido lo anterior, no recordáis lo anterior [...]. La historia no va a saltos. Cada etapa es consecuente de la anterior [...]. Me miran un poco indiferentes. Como si no entendieran a qué vienen mis razonamientos. (62)



Gabriela's disenchantment with politics, then, not only has to do with her disorienting return from three decades of exile or old age, but also her greater awareness of the political past of the nation and precarious nature of any one political moment. The presence of the past—a theme throughout the novel as Gabriela ponders her childhood and youth, her marriages and husbands' infidelities, and her experience as a teacher—takes on a particularly poignant role late in the novel as the Alzheimer's-stricken Gabriela begins to conflate the Republic and Civil War years with the present day of the transition to democracy. Her insistence on this past, despite stemming from memory loss, also serves as a testament to the prior historical moment, and the legacy she bequeaths to Juana, whether her daughter accepts it or not.

The final novel also sees a more complex version of the mother-daughter bond than previously depicted, as Gabriela is able to take up an ambivalent position, rather than the plenitude of pregnancy and Juana's baby years in *Historia de una maestra* or her frustrations with the adolescent Juana in *Mujeres de negro*. Here, Juana remains the great love of Gabriela's life, despite the mother's frequent feelings of abandonment by a daughter caught up in the political excitement of the transition: "[Juana], lejana y ocupada como está, sigue siendo la principal razón de mi existencia" (*FD*, 114). At the end of her life, Gabriela becomes able to reflect on the imperfections of their relationship, from both ends; not only does Juana not have enough time for her, Gabriela has also been reticent to share the deepest parts of herself with her daughter. At one point she wistfully thinks about Émile, the Guinean she fell in love with as a young woman, and wonders if she ever told her daughter; in the end wistfully concludes she did not (25-26). Later, thinking back to the letter Juana wrote her at the end of *Mujeres de negro*, she ponders the non-mutual dynamic of their relationship:

Juana me ha preguntado muchas cosas, pero a los hijos se les cuentan las verdades parciales. Una madre es

capaz de recibir el peso de las confidencias de un hijo por dolorosas y brutales que sean. Pero no podemos cargar a un hijo con el peso de nuestros descalabros. (74-75)

Whether her failure to share these experiences with Juana comes truly from not wanting to burden her daughter, or perhaps from embarrassment, Gabriela's consideration of her relationship with Juana is at life's end more nuanced and complex than ever before. Aldecoa's decision for the third book to be written as an interior monologue exclusively from Gabriela's point of view thus makes a great deal of sense, as we can see—before Alzheimer's sets in—the ways in which she is able to reflect on the difficulties and ambiguities of the mother-daughter relationship; sadly, however, these thoughts are only voiced internally, before Gabriela's memory loss sets in.

## Conclusions: Mother-Daughter Dialogue

In the trilogy, Aldecoa presents us with a maternal subject, whose experience is created through imaginative projection rather than actual memory or recall. At the first book's conclusion, Gabriela bequeaths the legacy of memory to her daughter, speaking in direct address for the first time to her interlocutor, Juana: "Contar mi vida... Estoy cansada, Juana. Aquí termino. Lo que sigue lo conoces tan bien como yo, lo recuerdas mejor que yo. Porque es tu propia vida" (*HM*, 232). In these lines, Aldecoa underscores the overall project of the three novels: a memorial dialogue between mother and daughter, where both can speak as equals and in true dialogue. Gabriela's admission that she is "tired" certainly can be read as a defeat of sorts, and in many ways it is, serving as the lead-in to the second novel, where she becomes withdrawn and is in a state of constant mourning. Nonetheless, she has told her story, shown herself to be more than just the permanently-mourning, prematurely-aged woman that her daughter

sees in the second book. In handing off the narration to her daughter, Gabriela gives her daughter's memory equal weight—perhaps stronger, as she “remembers better” than her mother does—and establishes them as equals or peers in their memorial project. Likewise, Aldecoa has constructed a parallel structure between a narrative invested with postmemorial interest and one invested with her own memorial capacity as a *niña de guerra*. The third novel, although it returns to a monologic rather than dialogic structure (it would have been interesting to see, perhaps, two parallel monologues of the same time period), nonetheless valorizes the mother's experience by painting an evocative and human portrait of the challenges of the end of life. Although Juana only speaks indirectly through her mother's relating of the novel's events, she is nonetheless present throughout, and the last words Gabriela expresses before dying—in her mind, as she has lost the power of speech—are “Juana, hija mía, Juana” (*FD*, 223). Although she does certainly on some level speak on behalf of her mother or mother's generation, the permissiveness of the genre allows Aldecoa's narrative to give her fictionalized mother a unique voice and a full subjecthood in a way that would be impossible in a strict historical or biographical text. Because the novels “imaginatively bridge the genres of history, memoir, and fiction” (Bergmann 112), Aldecoa's imaginative investment or projection does not silence her mother, but rather allows her to enter a dialogue with her daughter's own memory, passing the responsibility of testimony between one and the other. The novels, much like oral histories, put the daughter—and the reader—in the position of listener to the testimony, allowing the mother to speak for herself.

In writing the trilogy, however, Aldecoa does not merely undertake a dialogue between her own generational memory and that of her mother, or a dialogue between two fictional protagonists whose lives resemble their own. In giving voice to these two

women, Aldecoa gives voice to the history and stories of two generations of Spanish women. As Hirsch has noted, postmemorial work:

strives to *reactivate* and *reembody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone. (“The Generation,” 111)

Thus Aldecoa's work makes use of her own personal and familial experience to tell a story that has affected generations of Spaniards, using the stories of her protagonists to tell the broader story of the devastating personal and political ramifications of the Civil War—and the country's eventual return to democracy. In so doing, she also undertakes what Conner-ton describes as “giv[ing] voice to what would otherwise remain voiceless even if not traceless, by reconstituting the life histories of individuals;” (18) that is, telling the story of the women who lived through the war, lost their family members, and were forced to start anew. At the same time, the novels show us how, despite the strength of the mother-daughter bond, there always remains the impossibility of either mother or daughter fully understanding the other's past or present experience. In this sense, the texts achieve a similar effect, despite their overwhelmingly realist structure, to what Jo Labanyi has written of non-realist texts dealing with the Civil War; rather than simplify or make the reader feel good about having understood the difficult past, they give us “a sense of the difficulty of what it was like to live that past, as well as making us reflect on how the past interpellates the present” (112). Perhaps the success of her novels, and their role in setting off the memory boom in Spain, can be accounted for

thus: the past, like our parents, may not be possible to understand fully, but both nonetheless shape us irrevocably.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For an excellent alternative reading of post-memory in the trilogy, published subsequently to the writing of the present article, see de Menezes, Alison Ribeiro: "Family Memories, Postmemory, and the Rupture of Tradition in Josefina Aldecoa's Civil War Trilogy" (*Hispanic Research Journal* 13:3 (June 2012): 250-263.

<sup>2</sup>Suleiman goes further to break down the 1.5 generation into different groups depending on their age, which determine their cognizance of the events around them and their level of responsibility for themselves and their family. The youngest is "too young to remember" (0-3), then "old enough to remember but too young to understand" (4-10) and then "old enough to understand but too young to be responsible" (11-14). Their memory and experience of, and formation by, the Holocaust, varies to some degree according to these groups.

<sup>3</sup>In titling the novel *Mujeres de negro*, Aldecoa may reference the international women's anti-war protest group Women in Black, begun in Israel in 1988 in the wake of the First Intifada, and subsequently expanding worldwide, including two Spanish chapters, one in Seville and another in Barcelona, founded in 1992. As the novels themselves are a kind of anti-war statement based on women's experience, the title is apt, not only to designate various characters' mourning dress but also to connect the Spanish context to broader world events.

<sup>4</sup>In the context of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, some works of note include: Shirley Mangini's *Memories of Resistance: Women's Voices from the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Tomasa Cuevas's *Cárcel de mujeres* (1939-1945) (Barcelona: Sirocco, 1985), Mary Nash's *Rojas: Las mujeres Republicanas en la guerra civil* (Madrid: Taurus, 1999) and *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995), and Juana Salabert's *Hijas de la ira: vidas rotas por la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 2005), as well as novelistic reconstructions such as Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2002), whose testimonial sources are only revealed at the novel's conclusion.

<sup>5</sup>These terms are taken from Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember*. Connerton discusses two

categories of memorialization as *incorporating*—that is, transmitted through bodily activity—and *inscribing*—transmission through writing or other means that are recorded or stored and retrieved after the fact (72-3).

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