

Franco's repression in Navarre through its spaces of remembrance

José Miguel Gastón Aguas and César Layana Ilundain

Navarre Institute of Memory

Government of Navarre

Political cleansing in Navarre, *dismemory* and family resistance

On 18 July 1936, a military coup against the Second Republic was successful in Spain. The uprising had been forged in a small city in the north of the peninsula: Pamplona, where General Emilio Mola had been transferred months earlier. From then on, the violence unleashed by the rebels in Navarre became very intense, acquiring a multifaceted nature.

Thousands of people were detained in municipal and district prisons, in the Provincial Prison, in detention centres set up by the nationalist political forces (in particular the schools of Escolapios, occupied by the Carlist Central War Junta, and Salesianos, taken over by the Falange) and in prisons such as the San Cristóbal Fort. But the most terrible expression of this political cleansing was undoubtedly the planned and controlled murder by the principal military authorities, of nearly 3,000 people who ended up being buried in clandestine mass graves. Just when it seemed that the mass murders had come to an end, 795 prisoners escaped from the prison at San Cristóbal Fort, on Mount Ezkaba, on 22 May 1938. 206 of them, once captured, were murdered and buried in new clandestine mass graves. These burial sites were designed as places of *dismemory*, shielded by a regime where it was forbidden to remember, and which sought to erase the republican memory from history.

In the face of this calculated policy of disappearances, a determined, albeit silent, resistance emerged from the families of the murdered people who kept the memory of these places alive. One particular action occurred in the early 1960s at the pit cave Raso de Urbasa, where the bodies of three Amescoans murdered in 1936 had been dumped, and the plaque



1. Etxauri Memory Park. Navarre Institute of Memory.

placed in their memory was one of the first public symbols of remembrance in the whole of Spain, if not the first. From 1977 onwards, and for at least three years, an intense social movement flourished in Navarre, driven by relatives, neighbours, some local politicians and a considerable number of priests, in favour of locating and opening the clandestine graves in which the victims of the repression were buried. Their remains were taken to their hometowns to be given a dignified burial in the pantheons that were built to commemorate all the victims of the repression unleashed by the rebel factions in each locality. These pantheons have since become true places of remembrance. In 1980, furthermore, the sculpture of José Ramón Anda which commemorates the victims thrown into that pit cave in the Urbasa Mountain Range was installed, and tributes began to be paid in their memory. A resilient memory that took a vindicating step forward calling for public recognition through acts of homage and in the funeral space with the construction of pantheons and other memorial symbols. A collective memory interwoven by multiple memories and narratives, obstinate to policies aimed at annihilating all traces of those murdered, echoed in the numerous places of remembrance that were constructed and sustained by the results of new lines of historical research that questioned the fate of the vanquished.

The creation of the Sartaguda Memorial Park was undoubtedly a qualitative leap forward. As of May 2008, Navarre finally had its own space of reference in terms of remembrance. The Park brought together the collective efforts in the fight against *dismemory* in Navarre and strengthened the memorialist work of the associations. In the

years that followed, they continued to open mass graves, in the absence of institutional Navarrese support; developing projects for the recognition of forced labour; marking the homes of the murdered victims of reprisals or the places where they were buried; and raising awareness about one of the most emblematic spaces of repression in Navarre: the Fort of San Cristóbal and its Cemetery of the Bottles.

The Navarre Institute of Memory and the regulation of places of remembrance.

From 2015 onwards, there was a new memorialist revival, consequence of the new government taking on the agenda of the memorialist movement, which prompted a series of public policies on memory, based on six themes: the organisation of institutional acts of reparation for various groups of victims; the implementation of a plan for the exhumation and identification of disappeared persons; the removal of Francoist symbols and the democratisation of public space; the preservation and dissemination of the memory of the victims; the development of an educational programme for the intergenerational transmission of memory called Schools with Memory; and the promotion and preservation of places of historical memory in Navarre.

Over the following three years, a considerable number of plaques and monuments installed by the Government of Navarre commemorated civil servants, elected public officials, teachers, those interned in Gurs, those who worked on the construction of the road from Igal to Vidángoz or those who were murdered in Torrero cemetery in Zaragoza. Expressions of remembrance in which, similarly, memorialist associations and local entities proliferated with signs and monoliths in municipal buildings, in streets and squares or in places where repressive events took place.

The proliferation of spaces or places of remembrance in Navarre has kindled an awareness of a dual need: on the one hand, to transmit this

legacy of memory to society as a whole, paying particular attention to the younger generations; and, on the other, to protect this memorialist heritage from deterioration due to the passing of time or vandalism; also from politically motivated attacks as occurred at the end of the first decade of this century with the actions of the extreme right-wing group *Falange y Tradición*.

The Foral Law of Navarre 33/2013 echoed the term “places of remembrance” in article 9, although without elaborating on its definition, contemplated the recognition of places such as the Sartaguda Memorial Park and the Fort Alfonso XII prison. This generic protection, however, did not provide sufficient legal framework or sufficient regulatory procedure and for this reason, the Navarre Institute of Memory promoted the development of a specific law to remedy these shortcomings.

In November 2017, the Technical Coordination Commission for Historical Memory approved a provisional census of places of remembrance that should be given special protection by the administration. In it, the Sartaguda Memorial Park was highlighted for its emblematic nature. It also included several mass graves and the Cemetery of the Bottles; numerous places of detention and executions, including the Fort of San Cristóbal; sites of forced labour; memorial spaces or commemorative plaques, including the “*tropezones*” [sidewalk remembrance plaques].

Finally, the Foral Law of Navarre 29/2018, of 26 December, on Places of Historical Memory of Navarre received the endorsement of the Navarrese legislature with 48 votes in favour and only two abstentions. From the outset, the text expressed the commitment of Navarrese society to the memory of the victims of Franco’s repression. It is based on the conviction that memory –their memory– must become an essential tool when it comes to making progress in the construction of a real, fair and peaceful coexistence, critical of all processes of human rights violations, in the past and in the present. A memory, based on empathy, that encourages the development of public policies that respond to the right to truth, justice and



2. Olabe mass grave. Navarre Institute of Memory.

reparation with a view to the future, emphasising the establishment of guarantees of non-repetition.

During the first six months of 2019, thirteen places were entered in the Register, taking as a starting point the provisional Census of Places of Remembrance that had been approved by the Technical Coordination Commission on Historical Memory. These first inscriptions reflected a significant part of the multidimensional nature of Franco's repression. The first inscription, the Sartaguda Memorial Park, a meeting place for victims, relatives and associations. It is made up of a series of large sculptural pieces designed by artists such as José Ramón Anda (Atariaren Besarkada), Joxe Ulibarrena (Los Acribillados de la Santa Cruzada) and Néstor Basterretxea (Como Hoz Atávica y Mortal). In addition, these sculptural elements contain various texts reflecting on that tragedy, by authors such as Bernardo Atxaga, Castillo Suárez, Jokín Muñoz and the late José María Jimeno Jurío and Pablo Antoñana. All of them frame the great wall where the names of the people murdered in Navarre are written.

This was followed by places of mass murders, such as Bera quarry or Valcaldera in the area of las Bardenas where one of the most deplorable massacres took place in August 1936, when fifty Republican prisoners from the provincial prison were taken out and executed by firing squad. There are also emblematic pits, in terms of their number, such as La Tejería of Monreal, where around one hundred Republicans were murdered in successive round-ups; or in terms of their characteristics, such as the pit cave of Otsoportillo, where dozens of Republicans were dumped, or that of Legarrea, where Juana Josefa Sagardía and her six children were tossed. Somewhat different is the escape from San Cristóbal prison, marked as it is by the GR 225 footpath that follows the escape route of 22 May 1938, from the Fort of San Cristóbal on Mount Ezkaba to Urepel, the French village where one of the escapees, Jovino Fernández, managed to get to, and the pit of Olabe, a village in one of whose gullies sixteen young escapees were murdered. Forced labour was another of the repressive aspects

contemplated by the Foral Law and, in this sense, the road between Igal and Vidángoz was declared a place of remembrance, where a barracks similar to the one occupied by hundreds of prisoners has been reconstructed. The sculpture placed on the Arga Riverside walk in Peralta is a remonstrance against the repression of women. It represents three women in an embrace, and in their skirts depicted by an endless number of stones are the testimonies written by the memorialist universe of Navarre. There were memorials in memory of the victims erected by town councils, such as those of Etxauri and Ibero; also by associations, such as in the Sierra de El Perdón, where the stones forming a kind of cromlech recall the origin of those murdered in the many graves on the mountain. Finally, approaching the end of the time frame of the Foral Law, the stele in memory of Germán Rodríguez and the sculpture Gogoan, in Pamplona, which commemorate the dramatic events of the San Fermin festivals of 1978.

Once they have been declared and entered in the Register, the Government of Navarre undertakes to protect, conserve and, above all, publicise them. The latter is undoubtedly one of the great challenges and aimed especially at young people. For some time now, the Sites of Historical Memory of Navarre have a graphic identity, two letters “m” facing each other like a mirror image, symbolising the memory

underground (Lur Azpian) which exemplifies the clandestine mass graves dotted around the territory and a memory that emerges from that darkness, represented by the work of the families and associations, keeping alive the presence of those murdered and their values. A graphic identity that marks each of the totems or lecterns that have been erected in the Places of Remembrance, as well as the signs that mark the roads of Navarre and lead us to these places.

Once the mechanism for declaring a Place of Historical Memory in Navarre had been set in motion, it was necessary to reach a consensus with the associations of historical memory on the scope of the official Register. It seemed obvious that wherever Francoist repression took place, of one kind or another, with greater or lesser intensity, it was necessary to mark the terrain. However, we were aware that not all places could be included in the official Register. So, with the agreement of the associations, a website was designed, www.espaciosdememoria.com, where all the spaces, places, corners or spots where repression occurred are listed. In addition to a wide range of repressive typology, this website remembrance space expresses a series of thematic or geographical routes throughout Navarre. A first route, by way of example, crosses the Navarrese Pyrenees from west



3. Sartaguda Memory Park. Navarre Institute of Memory.



to east. A series of routes where Border and Memory meet. Along these routes we can draw upon the traumatic experiences of the forced labour prisoners who built roads and bunkers; and the dramatic experiences of those who had to cross the mountains to save their lives, echoing their forced exiles.

Spaces of Remembrance has an integrating component, where families and memorialist associations feel acknowledged. It becomes a mantle that encompasses the whole of Navarre, from which, on occasions, places of a more emblematic nature emerge, where different peoples, families or associations feel impugned; also society itself, obliged to incorporate them into the sphere of reflection and the transmission of democratic values, based on a critical view of the processes of human rights violations.

It is not easy to reconvert a space of horror into a place for coexistence, but this does not prevent us from continuing to strive to achieve it. The Navarre Institute of Memory, in collaboration with local bodies, memorialist associations and schools, has been promoting a programme for the transmission of memory which is making it possible, on the one hand, to learn about those events and, on the other, to generate consensus around the need to foster a culture of peace and democratic understanding, as well as criticism of human rights violations, both past and present.

In this direction, the programme *Schools with Memory* has made it possible to develop a series of activities focused on recovering the memory of what happened in Navarre from 1936 onwards in order to become an educational device. The programme draws inspiration, on the one hand, from the most innovative tradition of the social sciences education, which aims to problematise the curriculum and tackle relevant social problems in the classroom and, on the other, from the experiences that have been developed in schools in Navarre for some time. With one and the other, interspersed with government action, a space has been designed for encounter and dialogue on public memory policies that converge with educational proposals. A collaborative space where leafy shoots have sprouted that will form an ecosystem of their own in which critical memory is the air that is breathed. Shoots such as the intergenerational meetings in the Sartaguda Memory Park or walking the GR225 trails with our Freedom Bottles.

In short, they are spaces that warn us of the expansion of intolerant ideologies which, unfortunately, have once again re-emerged and which endanger the convictions and attitudes that were thought to be well established in democratic societies. Places of remembrance that engage in dialogue with others, dotted around the world in an attempt to consolidate a cordon to halt fascism.