

EDITORIAL

Once again, I have the pleasure of addressing you from our humble yet solid public platform represented by this new issue of *Observing Memories*. In a turbulent world, according to the latest statistics from our colleagues at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), we are living through a period with more open conflicts - ranging from explicit wars to political, social, and humanitarian disputes - than at any time since the Second World War. These conflicts are marked by constant violations of human rights, not only in our old Europe, particularly in the East, but also in the entrenched violence in Africa and Asia, the “dark silence” imposed on many women in autocratic nations, and the persistent lethal attacks on civilians in the Middle East. Faced with this reality and the worrying trend of democracy veering towards an extreme, unjust, and unthinking right-wing stance, feelings of perplexity and frustration have re-emerged in a glaring manner.

In this context, politics of memory - reflections on the past that serve as transformative values in the present - are more necessary than ever. Such politics of memory are interpreted as a social and political process that gives the past a future. This future is activated in the present, not as an abstract concept but as an ethical, social, cultural, and civic action that intersects with many others. It becomes, in the 21st century, a citizen's right, embodying the values of social justice, equality, reparations, and public responsibility. At the European Observatory on Memories (always in the plural), we critically approach the recent past. We recognise that memory is not a solution to current problems or conflicts; it is not a magical formula. This critical perspective aligns with Gensburger and Lefranc in the monograph we translated into Spanish, which calls for opening politics of memory to the multifaceted sphere of society through cultural memory, as Marianne Hirsch suggested long ago, or by embracing a new “memorial turn”, advocated by Professor Vinyes. This “turn,” which places memory at the centre as a right rather than a duty, also propels us towards a multidisciplinary approach, integrating memory into broader societal and political spheres while internationalising processes into increasingly universal concepts. These efforts do not aim to simulate protective policies but rather to establish substantive frameworks.

As we have consistently argued during our annual meetings, “Taking Stock on European Politics of Memory”, diversity, subaltern memories, and the concepts included in the new CERV programme outline various pathways that are correct in theory and also in the practice of promoting and implementing projects, research, and creative initiatives related to the uses of the past. We work in partnership with civil society, young people, and national and transnational historical memory associations to disseminate this right. We approach it as the right to truth, justice, and reparation, grounded in universal principles. To this, I add a new concept: “Public Responsibility”. Memory, as a space of power, also exerts influence on those who administer it, demanding responsibility - a responsibility that must also be executive. We know, particularly in Spain, that there are excellent legislative texts on the right to memory and its development. However, without implementation and the public responsibility to provide resources (budgets) and access to these laws, i.e., public policy, they generate much frustration and a certain escapism. Administrations (local, regional, national, international) are obliged to invest in this universal right, especially in its collective dimension. Perhaps then, and only then, can we call on societies to decide the countries and the future they want, not those imposed on them. We advocate two paths towards the social construction that memory represents. The first is a certain ethical disobedience, which is more necessary today than ever before, though always essential, and we pursue this through multiple channels. This magazine seeks to be a modest expression of that effort. The second path is the permanent integration of politics of memory into education. It cannot be repeated often enough: this must be implemented not as theory or public discourse but as concrete action. Pedagogically and inherently, education should be present in every

EDITORIAL

memorial activity, project, or action. At the same time, I return to the public responsibility to clearly and definitively apply knowledge of the past in official educational programmes, in a multidisciplinary but permanent manner. We must avoid the classic approach of doctrinaire pedagogy and instead equip young people with tools that allow them - rather than us - to develop their own means of transmitting and understanding knowledge. It is a challenge, but the most important one.

In this spirit, we directed EUROM's activities throughout 2024, applying comparative, transnational, and horizontal actions that also engage with our present. These have encompassed subaltern memories, analyses of political processes, lobbying and institutionalisation, network-building, gender and feminism, decolonialism, memorial planning and management, patrimonialisation, tourism, culture, monumentalisation, or the dissonant or uncomfortable resignification of spaces, critical academic, literary, historical, or artistic reflection, invisible memories, legislation, international projection, participation, pedagogy, creation—a wide array of actions and initiatives that we aim to promote and publicise through our information portal (www.europeanmemories.net).

There are many challenges, and critical analysis must remain a constant, alongside the social and cultural promotion of each programme and project we collaborate on or participate in. As I mentioned, this publication is one example of the constant renewal of memory as a process. I would like to thank the EUROM team and, especially, the authors for finding the time to contribute their expertise to our most “reflective and observant” publication.

In this edition, we focus on the Samudaripen/Porrajmos and its memorialisation process, which is tied to the challenges faced by the Roma community in obtaining recognition and reparations. For example, María Sierra provides an overview of these challenges within the context of post-war Germany and Europe, where the Romani people were not recognised as victims of genocide until several decades after the atrocities were committed. This argument is echoed in Anja Kožul's article, which outlines a similar context for the specific case of Croatia. The author highlights the rise of the far right across Europe and the persistence of various discriminatory practices as obstacles to addressing the marginalisation of the Roma people within the processes of reparation as victims of genocide.

In the section dedicated to politics of memory in Europe, we present two cases linked to the patrimonialisation of traumatic memories that transcend national boundaries and challenge the nations and societies of the continent. In the first case, Stéphane Michonneau and Babeth Robert reflect on the projection and uses of the so-called “martyred villages”, through a transnational comparative study of some of the most representative examples of this patrimonial category. In the second, Christian Dürr examines the complex and ambitious memorialisation project of the Gusen Concentration Camp. Its medium- and long-term implementation plan, involving both international experts and local residents - historically resistant to living alongside the memorial- makes it a reference case.

The political changes that occurred this past year in Argentina have alerted the international community to the need to preserve policies aimed at defending and promoting human rights. The ESMA Memory Site Museum, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2023, thus receives international recognition as a heritage element whose mission diverges significantly from the vision of the current Argentine government. We discuss this with Mayki Gorosito, Executive Director of the ESMA Memory Site Museum, who also shares insights into the complexities of memorialising the space.

In the section of short articles, we have several contributions of great interest due to the relevance of the processes they represent. One such case is presented by Diana Castelblanco, in which the materiality of objects evokes a memory powerful enough to counteract the deterritorialisation and loss of identity experienced by communities in post-conflict Colombia. Similarly, Javier Tébar and Andrea Tappi emphasise the importance of critical reflection when analysing Spain and Portugal's transitions to democracy, particularly in the current context of commemorating these milestones. For their part, Mario Proli and Patrick Leech discuss the mosaics of the former fascist-era pilot training school in Forlì, Italy. Featuring motifs glorifying fascist ideology and its connection to aviation, the mosaics remain intact in what is now a secondary school. This makes them a heritage asset with significant educational potential for future generations. In the same vein, Luiza Iordache and Rocío Negrete stress the importance of deepening research into overlooked subjects in historiographical narratives, such as the women who participated in the anti-fascist resistance in France.

In the reviews section, Ricard Conesa introduces us to the recently inaugurated Museu Nacional Resistência e Liberdade. Located in the Fortress of Peniche, near Lisbon, the museum honours the political prisoners of the Estado Novo regime and their struggle for freedom. Yayo Aznar offers reflections on the role of memory and its various material representations in a review of Daniel Palacios' book, *Making Monuments from Mass Graves in Contemporary Spain*. Palacios, in turn, reviews the work of Sanja Horvatinčić and Beti Žerovc, *Shaping Revolutionary Memory. The Production of Monuments in Socialist Yugoslavia*, which explores the unique characteristics of memory and monumental representation in the former Yugoslavia. Finally, David González introduces us to the story of the Spanish Republican teacher Antoni Benaiges, whose life inspired the film *El maestro que prometió el mar* (The Teacher Who Promised the Sea).

In the section dedicated to members of the EUROM network, Csaba Szilágyi reminds us of the fundamental role archives play as custodians of memory. Using the example of the Blinken OSA Archivum and its organic connection to the Central European University, we see how an archival institution's work in preservation, research, and dissemination can support democratic values and promote human rights. At Blinken OSA Archivum, this is achieved through initiatives such as those presented here, related to the Srebrenica massacre, current refugee crises, and the Holocaust itself.

As always, we have maintained a multidisciplinary approach and presented a plurality of actors and authors from diverse professional, geographical, and geopolitical perspectives. We hope you enjoy reading *Observing Memories 8*.



Jordi Guixé

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Observatory on Memories