

# EDITORIAL

On the eve of one of the gatherings we organised in Brussels, on 18 November, almost by chance, we attended a concert held for peace and against all wars, especially against the Israeli government's attack on Palestinian society. The event combined poetry, creative painting, various texts, music and an atmosphere of protest. It was yet another grassroots cultural action defending the right to live in peace in just societies where human rights violations are not a daily occurrence. Likewise, with the 50th anniversary of the death of dictator Francisco Franco coming up, reference was also made to Spain, raising themes such as democracy and antifascist resistance, calling for the full democratic construction of our system of civil liberties and guarantees at the local, regional, European and global levels. Past and present came together in an intergenerational and intermodal—now we would say interactive—way to remind us that society, in all its diversity, is vibrant and active, remembers its recent past, and that this memory is reflected in today's most pressing issues.

This act of recalling a past within the present through diverse means and methods of action and transmission is one of the objectives we also strive to achieve at our European Observatory on Memories (EUROM). Such interaction is not always evident, but it represents our core line of work.

EUROM's public window—its most reflective public expression—is the annual volume of the journal *Observing Memories*, now in its ninth edition. As its pages show, we are committed to high-quality, original texts by authors from an international and comparative perspective. Two major debates structure the present volume. One is around what we refer to as “memorial subalternity” and the contemporary dissonance of its heritage legacy in the present. We have sought to address subaltern and historically discriminated groups whose realities remain relevant in today's public debates: femininity and gender, anti-racism, asociality and others.

Secondly, this year we also address the fiftieth anniversary of a Spain that fought to transition from dictatorship toward a freedom born in the streets, a struggle which linked with the antifascist and democratic resistance that had been repressed for forty years by a military and national-Catholic regime. “The Dictator died in his bed, the dictatorship in the streets.” Indeed, EUROM is part of an agreement with the State Secretariat for Democratic Memory and the “Spain in Freedom: 50 years” Commissioner to conduct cultural activities, colloquia, conferences and exhibitions on topical issues related to the uses of the past, always advocating for the internationalisation of the debate and the memorial and historical knowledge of the Spanish case.

My son, who had just turned 16, asked me how he could engage with a memory that is no longer his but has been inherited, and how it relates to present-day conflicts and problems. Not wanting to give him a moralistic lecture which would go over his teenage head, I proposed a palette of colours representing a multitude of values in which to place the uses of memory. I told him that he should defend access to, observation of and even creative interaction with whichever colours he freely chose. Yet his choice, among many other factors, would involve reflecting on current conflicts and their constant questioning of our human condition, the past and rights which cost so many lives to obtain. I doubt the young man fully understood me, but the acquisition of rights and freedoms, in both the past and the present, should take precedence over the challenges that he and his generation will face in a digital world of predatory economies and an endless stream of daily information, much of it toxic. He made an interesting observation: Francoism was only studied from the fourth year of secondary school onwards, and the subject was almost never covered. He had only studied the interwar period and Mussolini. Nil, as the young man is called, added that now in sixth form he sees how the fascist and racist attitudes and expressions of other young people might be avoided or greatly mitigated if the subject had been covered in secondary school as part of the compulsory curriculum. This opinion was shared by some of the more vocational teachers and also by another young student who was doing a project on her great-grandfather, a survivor of Mauthausen and Sachsenhausen, who said that they had never before covered the Franco period in order to better understand the exile and deportation of Spaniards to Nazi camps. Perhaps we should apply the teaching of history or ethical values “in reverse”, as the great Marc Bloch proposed years ago, starting with the contemporary era.

These are paradoxical, complex times. We are embroiled in multiple crises and by threats besetting us from the far right or from wars desired only by a few unaccountable interests. They spread their nets and tentacles, pressuring us to succumb to their siren songs through hate speech propagated on social media and opaque platforms that seek to beguile the youngest minds. Perhaps this is the most delicate manipulative problem of an increasingly fluid society, one ever more subordinate to the dependence on “the digital” in its broadest sense. There are therefore many challenges in the educational engagement of our youth within an international context, which should also shape our European agenda. Without being alarmist, new forms of coup d’état are already being carried out through what some authors call “technological authoritarianism”, or a new power that is no longer just merely media-based but rather defined as “the new power of the more ambitious, ideological and increasingly privatised technological-authoritarian complex”. This too is undermining the foundations of our participatory democracy. We must therefore remain vigilant and strengthen those foundations currently under attack from various sides.

Turning to more pragmatic, even technical, but no less important matters: Europe is discussing the new long-term budget framework which will affect the destinies and public policies of States, regions and cities across the Union. The European Commission has launched a sound proposal to reinforce and promote projects and unify them under a major programmatic umbrella, what will be called AGORA EUROPE. It will bring together existing programmes and perhaps introduce new ones. The programmes most relevant to our fields of content include the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values Programmes (CERV or CERV Plus), cultural programmes through Creative Europe, educational programmes such as Erasmus or Erasmus+, research programmes under Horizon, and audiovisual creation or support through the MEDIA programme. It is a challenge the Commission intends to improve and which in theory we welcome and celebrate. There are two main areas I would like to pick out: the budgetary aspect, as the amount would double to reach eight billion euros—without a budget, there is no public policy; and the more political aspect, which is the need to strengthen a major programme representing a more social, cultural, civic and human (or humanistic, if I may say so) Europe. A Europe that will promote programmes and policies not only on memory but also on citizen participation, anti-racism, anti-exclusion, gender, LGBTIQ+ issues and more. The big question mark hanging over this good and appropriate initiative is how it will be received by the European Parliament, whether there will be cuts and how the European Council will vote. Ultimately, it is a challenge that will greatly affect civil society organisations based on values—including the founding values of the European Union—and on civil rights.

Returning to the content, this ninth edition of *Observing Memories* offers an overview of debates and issues shaping the contemporary memorial agenda. With a plural and critical approach, this issue brings together contributions exploring the inclusion of subaltern memories, the revisiting of colonial and slaveholding legacies, the challenges of democratic memory in Spain, and the tensions between commemoration and transmission in European and global contexts. Our aim is to open up spaces for reflection that connect research, institutional practice and citizenship, inviting readers to understand memory not as a static archive but as a living tool for justice, diversity and democratic construction.

In the *Deep View* section, we reaffirm EUROM’s commitment to making subaltern memories visible through two essential contributions. Monika Baár analyses the historical exclusion of persons with disabilities in European memory and advocates for their inclusion in building more just societies. She examines the causes of silence and proposes narratives that recognise diversity and agency, highlighting the importance of preserving archives and objects that document struggles for rights and the social model of disability. Likewise, Hisayo Katsui presents the case of Finland, which in 2025 launched the world’s first truth and reconciliation process directed at a disability community: the deaf and sign-language-using community. After decades of marginalisation, prohibition of sign language and eugenic policies, the process seeks to acknowledge historical harm, offer redress and promote inclusion.

Another of EUROM's strategic lines concerns the deepening of colonial and slaveholding memories and their dialogue with public space and European citizenry. This is the focus of the *Europe Insight* section. Andrew Davis and Nick White present the Waterfront Transformation Project, promoted by National Museums Liverpool since 2021, which aims to renovate the historic docks and integrate colonial legacies into the urban narrative, ensuring community participation and reorienting spaces within the Maritime Museum and the International Slavery Museum. Meanwhile, Krystel Gualde introduces the Memorial to the Abolition of Slavery in Nantes, unveiled in 2012, which addresses the slave-trading past of France's main port in the Atlantic traffic as an ethical call to remember the contemporary existence of new forms of slavery.

Our interview features Dr Amos Goldberg, an Israeli historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a specialist in cultural studies of the Holocaust and other genocides. The conversation explores the relevance of Holocaust memory in the European context, analyses strategies to combat antisemitism and offers essential analytical insights into understanding the scope of the crimes perpetrated by Israel in the Gaza Strip.

The *Overview* section includes an article by Dietmar J. Wetzel on the current challenges facing Europe's collective memory, highlighting the need to understand it as a common good integrated into critical education, public discourse and institutional practice. We also have a contribution by Guillermo León on Castuera Concentration Camp in Extremadura (Spain). A paradigmatic site of memory, representative of thousands of stories silenced for decades, it points to the heart of the Francoist repressive system and its material and immaterial remnants across the country.

In a context of exceptional relevance, we highlight the contributions linked to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of the dictator Francisco Franco. Carmina Gustrán, Commissioner for the Commemoration of "Spain in Freedom: 50 years", outlines the strategic foundations of the commemorative events, emphasising the role of youth and popular mobilisation in generating a more just future. Equally, Kostis Kornetis advocates a model of commemoration that eschews heroism and draws on examples from Portugal and Greece to foster a critical perspective in Spain which includes social movements, micro-histories and cultural practices.

In the *Review* section, we include noteworthy contributions such as Jo Labanyi's analysis of the book *Cultural Legacies of Slavery in Modern Spain* (2025), edited by Akiko Tsuchiya and Aurélie Vialette; David González's review of the film *Marco* (2024); and Oriol López's thoughts on the exhibition *El Negre de la Riba*.

Finally, in the *Sightseeing* section, Emanuele Morezzi, Chiara Mariotti, Leila Signorelli and Alessia Zampini present *Dissonant Heritage and War. Conservation and Communication of a Difficult Legacy (Co.Co.War)*, a project envisioned as a critical reflection and systematic framework exploring theoretical questions and exemplary cases related to interventions in Dissonant Heritage.

We hope that this edition of *Observing Memories* sparks readers' interest and helps expand the debate on memories in the plural, fostering critical reflection and civic engagement. Each contribution invites us to question established narratives, explore new perspectives and embrace memory as a living tool for justice, inclusion and democracy. Our aim is for these pages not only to inform but also to inspire researchers, professionals and civil society to continue building spaces for dialogue and action in the face of contemporary challenges. Because remembering is not a passive gesture: it is an active practice that defines our shared future.



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