

## WALTER BENJAMIN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2023

16, 17, 18 November 2023

Organizers: Memorial Democràtic, MUME, Walter Benjamin Chair (UdG). With the collaboration of EUROM (+ Solidarity Foundation of the University of Barcelona), CCCB, Nau Còclea. With the support of Ajuntament de Portbou, Diputació de Girona, Ajuntament de Girona and Consell social of the University of Girona.

### «The times of memory and the times of history. Governance of traumatic pasts»

In roughly the past three decades legal articles have been passed in many of the countries that have experienced armed conflicts or dictatorial political regimes characterised by the systematic violation of human rights. Their aim, above all, is to redress the hardships that a relevant part of the population suffered in recent times. Therefore, it often implies bringing to light unjust and inhuman situations that are considered ethically inadmissible in democratic contexts and, on the insistence of a part of society, the decision is made to legislate so that “that which should never have happened” does not happen again. However, in post-democratic and illiberal scenarios - on the rise in recent years - the passing of memorial laws is used to achieve the opposite objective: the concealment of controversial episodes of the past and putting history at the service of national exaltation.

Legislating largely implies regulating, ordering, and structuring access to the past. It comprises including legal, moral, and political criteria when interpreting the near past. When faced with the evidence of perpetrated atrocities, one often talks of the “duty of memory”. It’s a way of confronting the past that, despite good intentions, establishes certain pathways for dealing with an inherited legacy. Out of regard for exercising free critical thinking, this means that no limits can be placed when investigating and interpreting it in academic spheres. It would not be in agreement with the imposition of a canonical, unidirectional view of the past, a so-called “official discourse”.

At the same time, there are obviously facts and attitudes that are very bad and not easily acceptable in a democratic society. Denialisms, revisionisms with no basis tend to circulate in media space with hardly a care. When faced with this situation, which if taken to extremes is somewhere between populist memorial slogans and sterile academic rigidity, it is obvious that the quality of democracy is what will suffer the most. The “do-goodism” and excessive compassion, from one hand, can entail simplifications leading to incomplete perspectives of the past in which relations of domination and even forms of resistance disappear for the sake of sacralising the victim. On the other hand, in the name of scientism, underestimating memory as a way of approaching the past can become dehumanising and even cynical.

The past plays an important part in making up the present of societies and therefore it is definitely not material that is locked away in an ivory tower and made available only to academics. On the contrary, it is a legacy – very often a conflictive one – that links up traumatically with the present. How to live with it is one of the biggest challenges and many are the societies that design and deploy governance measures in relation to the inheritances they’ve received. The management of this past is a great challenge. A few years ago, the historian Antoine Prost and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur suggested a shift from the famous term “the duty of memory” and were in favour of “the duty of history” in order to facilitate the “right to memory”.

This conference, from a discussion of some key concepts and examples from different geographical and historical realities will broach these controversial realities that relate the close ties between history, memory, the will to legislate and ultimately public policies on memory as governance tools of those “pasts that don’t completely pass”.

## Program

### Thursday, November 16

Girona. Graduate Hall of the Faculty of Letters, University de Girona

#### Opening session

18.30 h Institutional presentations

18.45 h Opening lecture

«History and memory and their weight in contemporary culture » **Josep Maria Fradera** (Fac. d'Humanitats/ Institut Universitari d'Història Jaume Vicens Vives, Pompeu Fabra University)

19:45 h Ceremony of the International Award Walter Benjamin, VIth Edition, 2023

### Friday, November.17

Barcelona. CCCB, Barcelona, Room 2

#### Morning session:

09.15 - 09.30 h Welcome

09.30 - 10.30 h «A critical genealogy of the concept “duty of memory”» **Sébastien Ledoux** (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne / Sciences Po, Paris)

10.30 - 11.30 h «Policies on memory in Argentina. An overview» **Marisa González de Oleaga** (Fac. Ciencias Políticas y Sociología, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia-UNED)

11.30 - 12.00 h Coffee break

12.00 - 13.00 h «Japan, Corea, China, Taiwan. Memory wars and their political impact on the present» **Chiao-In Chen** (Fac. Filosofia i Lletres /Centre d'Estudis de les Democràcies i Dictadures /Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona-CEDID-UAB)

13.00 - 14.00 h «Eastern Europe. Memories after the “end of history”» **José María Faraldo** (Complutense University of Madrid / Centre for Contemporary History, Potsdam)

#### Afternoon session :

16.00 - 17.00 h «The implementation of international human rights law and its linkage in the discourses of history and memory» **Alfons Aragoneses** (Direcció General de Memòria Democràtica /Fac. de Dret - Pompeu Fabra University)

17.00 - 18.00 h «Germany facing its past. A model?» **Emmanuel Droit** (University of Strasbourg Sciences Po)

18:00 - 19:00 h Closing conference

«Historical transmission of recent past, policies and laws on memory in Spain. A state of the art from the period of transition to democracy» **Paloma Aguilar Fernández** (Fac. Ciencias Políticas y Sociología Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia-UNED)

### Saturday, November 18

#### Portbou

08.00 h Walter Benjamin Route. Walking route from Banyuls to Portbou. With an artistic performance by Nau Còclea. Registration: register at Ajuntament de Portbou before **November 15, 2023**. T. (0034) 972 390 274 - portbou@portbou.cat. Meeting place: Oficina de Turisme de Portbou. Passeig Lluís Companys s/n. Free transfer to the departure point

Portbou: Sala La Congesta (C/ Méndez Núñez 20)

18.30 h *L'enterrador [The gravedigger]*. By **Gerard Vázquez** and **Pepe Zapata**. Companyia Teatro de dos. Free theatre performance with ticket reservation. Reservation: Oficina de Turisme de Portbou T. (0034) 972 125 161 - turisme@portbou.cat