

## Faces and traces of violence/Rastros y rostros de la violencia

This dossier displays a selection of the work presented during the last six years in the permanent international seminar *Faces and Traces of Violence/Rastros y rostros de la violencia* (<http://politicadela memoria.org/es/conferencias-rastros-y-rostros.html>) held monthly at IL-LA-CCHS-CSIC. The seminar began in April 2008 — when it was still unnamed — with talks by Renato Rosaldo and Marie Louise Pratt (New York University) who presented, respectively, on ethnographic narratives and the ‘linguistics of war’ in the Afghanistan conflict. A year later, the seminar continued with a presentation given by Katherine Lutz and Matthew Gutmann (University of Brown) regarding US deserters in the Iraq war. In 2010, the seminar started to gain momentum, and in early 2011, it became a monthly — at times twice-monthly — seminar. It continues with this rhythm up until the present moment.

Since its beginning, the seminar has been a space for public and academic debate, and its main objective has been the development of critical, comparative and interdisciplinary analyses of different manifestations of violence (especially political and war-related violence) both historically and in the present moment, as well as the development of careful reflections regarding the intricate memory politics that have emerged as a result the contingent reactivation of these violent acts, both in the past and the present. Studying the ways in which past violence is activated and deactivated through social memory is certainly no easy task. Memory politics are a truly slippery ground in and of themselves. This is perhaps accentuated when these memory politics refer to forms of suffering in the past, when they contribute to the refashioning of old and new categories of victims and perpetrators or when they hook up with transnational humanitarian discourses and practices, intersect with identity politics and/or become ingrained in rhetoric and practices of exclusion, and so on. It is precisely the need for deciphering the contemporary prominence of debates regarding memory in local, national and transnational spaces that is both the basis behind the existence and the reason for its continuity.

*Faces and Traces of Violence* started as a spin-off of a CSIC-led research project devoted to the interdisciplinary analysis of twenty-first century exhumations of Civil War graves in Spain, which started in 2007. Yet, to better understand this rather intricate process, initially framed and understood in national terms, the seminar soon opened its focus wider to incorporate other experiences related to exhumations carried out in other countries and political contexts and increasingly linked with human rights discourses and practices and to include other interfaces, both

theoretical and empirical, regarding the intersection of violence and memory across the world. By zooming in and out of the Spanish case, the seminar has gained a broader scope regarding the role and differential expressions of social memory in contemporary societies. This is what has become the seminar’s true academic DNA. To increase the visibility and dissemination of the work presented in our seminar, since June 2012, we have video-recorded the majority of our invited speakers’ presentations, which can now be easily consulted on the project’s webpage.

During the last six years, and always with the objective of fostering systematic, critical thinking and connecting our research project with ongoing international debates, *Faces and Traces of Violence* has invited experts from different Spanish universities and research centers, as well as from institutions all over the world, including: New York University, Princeton University, the University of Michigan, the University of California at Merced, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Notre Dame, the University of Edinburgh, Cambridge University, Oxford University, Goldsmiths College at the University of London, Kingston University, Manchester University, the University of Chile, the NIOD Center for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, Utrecht University, the Academic College in Tel-Aviv, the University of Porto, Ghent University, the Central European University in Budapest, the University of Iceland, Marburg University, the University of Konstanz, the CNRS and the University of Medellín.

The seminar sessions have witnessed lively debates on topics including the following: militaristic representations of the world; memory and mourning in Argentina and Chile; the role of forensic science in the investigation of political violence; the connections between memory, philosophy and theater; the cinematographic recycling of political violence; the forms and meaning of poetry in post-war contexts; the “transnationalization” of forced disappearances and other victimhood models; the use of media in peace-building; the gray areas of the Gypsy Holocaust; the effects of transitional justice policies in post-war Bosnia; the structural violence affecting border crossings in Northern Mexico; how material objects elicit memory in traumatic contexts; the evolution of contemporary memory politics in Spain and Latin America; transnational memory practices and identity politics in contemporary El Salvador; the social and political effects of confessions of perpetrators in the framework of truth commissions; the development of a memory “market” in Latin America; the relationship between human rights and copy rights; the painful re-elaboration of Nazism and

the horrors of the Second World War in Austria and Germany; the role of the new media in the creation of new modalities of witnessing and victimhood; the contemporary management of the corpses of mass violence; the role of ruins in the making of national memories; the bureaucratic aftermath of massacres in Colombia; and the memorial processes linked to exiles, diasporas and genocides.

Or, as displayed in this dossier's selection of articles, the seminar has also touched upon other equally diverse topics such as the configuration of cosmopolitan memories on a global scale after the Holocaust; the critical analysis of the tropes and narratives used both in historiography and public debates to define Europe's violent twentieth century; the shocking aftermath of the experience of the Soviet Gulag for some Bolshevik loyalists; the emergence of global *memoryscapes* in France; the politics behind the non-remembrance of the Holocaust in Hungary; the attempts to deal with the legacy of the dictatorship in Portugal; the impact of mass grave exhumations from the Spanish Civil War in the reactivation of conflicting memories of the conflict; the difficulties in accessing and making sense of the archives of violence in the aftermath of Spanish dictatorship; the tensions between memorial places and national heritage in post-Pinochet Chile; and the enormous power of forced disappearances to disrupt the social fabric in contemporary Mexico.

*Faces and Traces of Violence* is the product of many hands. It was originally conceived by me and my wife Chun (Asunción Gaudens), who died in March 2013, and to whom this issue of *Culture and History* is heartfully dedicated. She was not only crucial to the development of the concept behind the seminar since its initiation, but she was also the creator of its public face: the research project's website, which she designed and developed (<http://politicadela memoria.org/index.php>). In fact, until her death (and thereon), all seminar posters bear her very recognizable and delicate imprint. I also want to thank graphic designer Jorge Morales (CCHS-CSIC) for his efforts in continuing this work.

A great deal of the seminar's success and, indeed, its very *permanence*, are the product of the extraordinary work carried out by doctoral researchers who have participated, at different moments, in several successive research projects at the CCHS-CSIC: Ulrike Capdepón, Marije Hristova, Lee Douglas, Zoé de Kerangat, Alfonso Villalta and Laura Martín. Their inspiring research collective *Memorias en Red* (<http://memoriasenred.es/>) has proven decisive in consolidating a sophisticated critical mass of young scholars who are interested in the study of violence and social memory. This network has provided the seminar with some of its best sponsors, polemicists and critics. Their loyal and long-term participation in the seminar has been, and still is today, truly priceless.

Throughout the seminar's existence, this initiative has received funding from a wide variety of sources: an intramural CSIC Project PIE 200710I006 (2007-2009), the VII FP ITN Marie Curie *Sustainable Peace Building* program (2010-2013), and two consecutive research projects funded by the Spanish Government's *Plan Nacional*: CSO2009-09681 (*Las políticas de la memoria en la España contemporánea*) and CSO2012-32709 (*El pasado bajo tierra*). In the period 2010-2013, the seminar was part of the academic structure of the CCHS research line JUSMENACU (*Justice: Memory, Narration and Culture*), which incorporated researchers from ILLA and IFS. Currently, the seminar is also part of the European COST Action IS1203 entitled *In Search of Transcultural Memory* (ISTME). It is also part of the academic activity at the UNED-based *Centro Internacional de Estudios de Memoria y Derechos Humanos* (CIEMEDH). Finally, I would like to thank *Culture and History's* editorial team, especially Carmen Ortiz and Chelo Naranjo, for inviting us to coordinate this dossier.

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