



THE CULTURES AND GLOBALIZATION SERIES 4

HERITAGE, MEMORY & IDENTITY

Edited by

HELMUT ANHEIER
YUDHISHTHIR RAJ ISAR





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Guest Editor
Dacia Viejo-Rose

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GRASSROOTS MEMORIALS AS SITES OF HERITAGE CREATION

Cristina Sánchez-Carretero and Carmen Ortiz



Various ritual forms of memorialization, mourning and protest in public spaces have emerged in recent years; a fixed pattern of memorials located at the places where particular deaths are considered 'unjust' and traumatic, either because a famous person has been killed or because anonymous citizens have been the victims of a massacre. These improvised memorials have been dubbed 'grassroots memorials' by Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011) in order to highlight both their political dimension and their non-institutionalized character. This chapter explores such memorials, with particular reference to the Archivo del Duelo (Archive of Mourning) – a research project established in response to the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004 in Madrid.

Grassroots memorials: a global and mediatized phenomenon

The appearance, as an international phenomenon, of grassroots memorials in public spaces, usually

on the site of the events that have caused the tragic and violent death of a famous person or, as in the case of the Madrid bombings of 2004, a group of ordinary people, has caught the attention of anthropologists in recent years. Several have explored how these deaths are coped with collectively (Santino 1992, 2006a, 2006b; Haney et al. 1997; Grider 2000, 2001; Fraenkel 2002; Chulilla et al. 2005; Doss 2006, 2008; Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2007, 2011; Sánchez-Carretero, 2011). Comparative studies on the construction of memory in response to deaths that society considers traumatic are particularly significant in this regard.¹ The performative dimension is one of the characteristics that grassroots memorials have in common. We use the adjective 'performative' in the Austinian sense (Austin 1962) in relation to the acts involved in the process. Grassroots memorials are more than a public expression of mourning: they are actions that can trigger other actions. Citizens not only place their offerings in memory of the dead, but also demand other actions: explanations of what has occurred, that guilty parties be found, or that someone take responsibility (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2007: 2). The dual performative and commemorative nature of these altars in public spaces is therefore one of their essential properties: they bring the element of individual remembrance and commemoration together with the component of social intervention, for example by drawing attention to the social and political conditions that led to the deaths, and by consequently mobilizing the population.

There is no consensus about how to name this type of memorial. The term 'spontaneous shrines' was coined in 1992 by Jack Santino in a study of the places created to memorialize political deaths in Northern Ireland (Santino 1992). The use of the word 'spontaneous' indicates the unofficial nature of the display; no institution – nation, state or church – issues an invitation to take part in this ritual; it is a popular activity, in the sense that people are its active subject. The word 'shrine' is used

because they are places of communion between the living and the dead. They are also places of pilgrimage, where people go to commemorate and memorialize, but they are open to the public at large (Santino 2006b: 11–12), unlike monumental memorials, which include limited or no participation of the general public in the rationale behind them, whose objectives are controlled by some type of political or religious authority, and which are also distant in time from the events they commemorate (Young 1993).

A subsequent debate regarding the religious sense of using the term 'shrine' as well as the questionable spontaneity of the memorials has led other researchers to employ the term 'improvised' or 'ephemeral' memorials (Stengs 2003). In the media, however, the most common term is 'makeshift memorial', although in academia, 'makeshift' is not commonly used because of its negative connotations.² To avoid the focus on the 'temporality' aspects, and the problems regarding the 'spontaneity' of the memorials, in a recent study Margry and Sánchez-Carretero coined the term 'grassroots memorials' in order to highlight the fact that what unifies these ritualized patterns for the expression of mourning is their component of political action, in the widest sense of the term, and their non-institutional nature (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011). That is to say, there are other types of ephemeral memorial, which are not necessarily grassroots memorials, such as flowers, letters or other offerings that are placed on the tombs of loved ones or on a monument, but what connects the pattern of contemporary grassroots memorials is not their temporality, but instead the connection that they make between commemoration and protest, on the one hand, and on the other, the fact that at group level, the death is considered as something traumatic. Not only are objects deposited in memory of the victims or the deceased, but there is also an implicit message that 'this should not have happened', or that 'something has to be done'.

With regard to the type of death that characterizes these memorials, in his paper 'The New Public Mourning', Tony Walter (2008) establishes two categories of the deceased, commemorated through what the author refers to as 'new public mourning': media personalities and victims. The second group includes the victims of acts of terrorism, and the victims of catastrophes and accidents.

While conventional memorials are erected as permanent monuments with a future audience in

mind, grassroots memorials are intended for an immediate audience. The first are passive, while the second are extraordinarily dynamic (Grider 2001: 3). Grassroots memorials also have a firmly political nature, as silent witnesses to violence and pain. Although, depending on the deaths intended to be commemorated, the rituals may tend more towards a commemorative function rather than a political denouncement, in all of the cases the aim is to achieve a specific commemoration of the victims, individualizing them. This became apparent in the rituals of public mourning that occurred after the attacks of 11 March 2004, when the messages, photos, personal letters, dedications and offerings were all made for and aimed at individual victims, often addressing them by name. Photographs of the dead appear frequently, in an attempt to resist their becoming statistics; and special focus is placed on presenting them as real people. In that sense, grassroots memorials are political declarations to prevent individual voices from being silenced (Santino 2006b: 13). The memorials insist on the presence of those people now absent, a position that was reiterated after the attacks in Madrid with the frequently-repeated cry of 'we were all traveling in that carriage', 'we were all in that train'.

The same words of condolence, of mourning, of sharing in the grief of the family that can be found in private mourning rituals were also found in the stations, written in a wide variety of formats, supports, types of writing and forms of expression. Through these expressions, the participants in these rituals of mourning establish personal relationships with the deceased; relationships which, while imaginary, are nonetheless very real (Santino 2006b). The large number of photographs of the victims that appeared on the memorials in the stations, and also the reports on practically every one of the victims that appeared in the media, are reminders of this ritual function.

Contextual information about grassroots memorialization in Madrid

From the very day of the bombings in Madrid, people began to visit the epicentres of the explosions, leaving behind poems, flowers, letters, messages, candles, cuddly toys and religious images in memory of the victims. Our focus is on the material

culture of the grassroots memorials placed in Atocha, El Pozo and Santa Eugenia, the three stations along the 'Corridor of the river Henares' where the four bombs killed 192 people and injured a further 1,857 – according to the official figures included in the judicial process. Similar memorials also appeared in other parts of the city, in the workplaces of people who had died in the explosions, and on emblematic monuments, shops windows and the façades of private homes in Madrid and throughout the rest of Spain. But citizens did not only take hold of public spaces in order to sacralize the places where the attacks had taken place and remember the dead; during this period of shock and horror, first information and then responsibilities were sought from the government and authorities. The shrines at the stations were one form of public response to the attacks, and they can also be considered within the context of the actions that also occurred in the political sphere after the attacks, which preceded the general elections by only three days (Sánchez-Carretero 2006: 334). The demonstrations of 12 March saw 11 million people take to the streets in cities all over Spain to express their repulsion of the attacks. On the following day, 13 March, popular political action took the form of a campaign carried out by mobile phone and SMS that called for the public to reject and oppose the version of events being upheld by the government, which insisted that the attacks had been carried out by the Basque terrorist movement ETA. The massive mobilization of the Spanish population on 12 and 13 March 2004 has to be considered in the light of previous demonstrations against the war in Iraq, which protested against government propaganda in favour of the war, and the instrumentalization of certain media to support the war (Sampedro 2005). That the grassroots memorials which appeared in the train stations were not only an expression of pain, grief and remembrance of the victims, but part of the strategy for action in the political arena becomes evident when the materials deposited at the stations are examined. Among these materials, the same banners appeared (literally the same banners used in the demonstrations of 12 March in Madrid) as offerings.

Another important contextual piece of information not directly related to the bombings, but that needs to be taken into account when conducting research about mourning and memory in Spain, is the politicization of mourning in contemporary

Spain. The mourning of victims of the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) introduced a division of mourning and its rituals as a means of political legitimization during Franco's dictatorship and afterwards (Cruz 2009: 13–17; Viejo-Rose 2009, and in this volume). To do this, the 'victorious' group, which formed the post-war Spanish State, separated 'mourning' for those who had fought and died on its side and whose memory it maintained and commemorated from 'forgetting' and de-ritualizing the deaths of those it considered to be enemies, making them disappear physically and socially. As a result, a classification system emerged whereby: 'The dead who are incumbent upon the state are included in a ritual symbolic system, which the state activates in order to create and recreate a sense of "community", and to produce citizens who are uniform and loyal in social terms' (Frigolé 2003: 31). By taking over the public space to ritualize their grief for the attacks of 11 March, the general public response, in a sense, also sought to pre-empt any type of manipulation by the political powers of the time.

The Archive of Mourning project

Within this context, the Archive of Mourning is a research project³ aimed at documenting, archiving and analyzing the displays of mourning that occurred after the terrorist attacks of 11 March 2004. The project has two objectives. The first, of an undeniably heritage-based character, consists of creating a collection of documents and materials that are expressions of mourning and which, due to their ephemeral and anonymous nature, usually disappear. This process provides a unique opportunity to preserve individual and collective displays of mourning such as drawings, letters, poems and other objects that were deposited at Atocha and the other railway stations where the explosions occurred. An agreement was signed between the Spanish railway company (RENFE) and the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) to collect these materials. The second objective is to analyze processes of mourning experienced in the days after the attacks, based on the tenets of the anthropology of violence, and analysis of civic space, group expressions, rituals of mourning, and popular religion.

Until now, these types of collective and ephemeral display had not been considered as objects

that formed a part of a 'heritage' process.⁴ These expressions of mourning, which are not appreciated as formal or integral components of our historical legacy, are significant however, for they are the forms of expression chosen by citizens in times of crisis. This makes it essential to study them in order to understand the mechanisms of mourning that occurred in response to the attacks. The work of creating an ethnographic archive is central to research in that it provides the primary material for interpreting the meaning of events and discovering the value that specific popular displays can have. Yet, as has been indicated in a number of research and heritage initiatives that emerged in New York after the attacks of 11 September 2001, the archive project also forms a part of a citizens' movement through which many of the actions carried out by professionals (photographers, journalists, specialists in communication, ethnographers, etc.) had the same function and the same objective: to mobilize people in order to overcome the paralysis and shock caused by the attacks. In a sense, the need to start this project developed as a need to leave evidence of what was happening, to mark the grassroots memorials so that they could not be ignored, and to document a part of reality in order to attempt to understand it (Taylor 2003: 241).

The origins of the archival project lie in the days that followed the train bombings of 11th March,⁵ when the CSIC research group called on colleagues – anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists, and social workers – to collaborate in documenting the memorials that were springing up on a largescale in the railway stations, as well as to gather oral testimonies and collect electronic messages about the attacks and the emotions they provoked. The first materials collected consisted mainly of photographs and video footage of displays of grief recorded by colleagues, together with a series of objects and electronic messages. Eventually, the project also received material gathered through other initiatives, such as *Madrid in Memoriam*, a project whose website included thousands of photographs taken by professionals and amateurs both in Madrid and in many other European cities in the days after the attacks.⁶

Three months after the attacks, all of the offerings left in the stations were removed. Their size, especially those in Atocha, the fire hazard posed by the presence of thousands of lit candles, the extra work that they created for the cleaning and maintenance

staff (i.e. to remove dry flowers and burnt out candles and to man the railings around the memorials) combined with the desire that the stations return to their normal operations, led RENFE to remove them. In their place, a 'cyber shrine' was created, known as the *Espacio de Palabras* (literally, 'Word Space')⁷ which allowed people to leave electronic messages of condolence or in memory of the victims at the entrance to Atocha and El Pozo stations.⁸ RENFE employees published a letter in the newssheet *Rojo y Negro* of the trade union CGT (Confederación General de Trabajadores or General Confederation of Workers) asking for the removal of the candles and other ephemeral offerings in order to be able to continue with their work, ending the letter: 'we ask for the candles in the entrance to the station to be removed, and that a permanent monument be built nearby. We ask for respect for the memory of the dead, and for the grief of the survivors. Basically, we ask that we be allowed to overcome this tragedy.'⁹ On 9 June 2004, the grassroots memorials of Atocha were removed, and the Minister of Public Works, Magdalena Álvarez, inaugurated the cyber shrine. Thanks to an agreement signed between RENFE and the CSIC, the Archive of Mourning received the objects that were removed from the stations by the company, together with almost 60,000 messages received in the first few months of the Word Space initiative. The resulting inventory of the Archive of Mourning consists of 2,482 photographs, 495 objects, 6,432 messages written on paper, 76 audio and video recordings, and 58,732 electronic messages.

The structure of memorials to the attacks of 11 March

The grassroots memorials commonly took the form of objects and written messages attached to the walls and gates of the train station where the bombs were detonated. As these spaces filled up, offerings began to be placed on the ground. Flowers were often stacked vertically, as they were leant against walls, while red candles were placed on the ground, thus creating a visually striking image of vertical walls of flowers and horizontal surfaces of burning candles. People deposited their offerings with great care to avoid disturbing those that were already in place. An indication of the

memorial intention behind these gestures can be evidenced in how at the different stations and locations small groupings of offerings appeared, echoing the layout of the offerings they replaced, or joining others which stood alongside them (Grider 2001: 3). Further analysis of the objects deposited also reveals a type of visual 'vocabulary' that is often found in these types of ritual despite the specific features of individual cases. The offerings most commonly found are flowers, candles, and a series of objects deemed appropriate for such occasions: teddy bears and toys (particularly if there are children among the victims), religious images, photographs, flags, T-shirts with messages, banners, drawings and paintings, and, in this case, a huge variety of messages written on paper, as if taken together they composed an immense, informal book of condolences (Grider 2001).

The grassroots memorials, and the objects of which they are composed, are revealing of the people and the community to which they are dedicated, and also tell us about the people and the community that create them. For example, in the case of other terrorist attacks, such as those of 11 September 2001 in New York, a particularly important element was the appearance of patriotic symbols, especially the American flag. Spanish flags also appeared in memorials in Madrid, although there were equally as many (or perhaps more) from other autonomous regions within Spain and from other countries, in honour of the diverse origins of the victims. Flags were also used as backdrops on which to attach messages of various kinds: insults against politicians, against terrorists, peace messages, and condolences, among many others. As one-third of the 192 people who died in the trains were immigrants, the memorials included a wide variety of offerings for people from specific communities, particularly Rumanians and Ecuadorians (cf. Chulilla et al. 2005; Sánchez-Carretero 2006).

There were noticeable differences between the displays of mourning in the different stations. For example, El Pozo and Santa Eugenia, which are tightly-knit communities with a strong neighbourhood spirit (in fact many inhabitants of El Pozo had a direct relationship with victims), the offerings and memorials were more individualized in nature: messages dedicated to the deceased left there by people who knew them personally (Sánchez-Carretero 2006: 341). Although these types of personalized offering were also to be found in Atocha,

a much larger number of people visited this central Madrid station, which attracted many visits from people not residing in the city – i.e. political figures, athletes travelling through Madrid for competitions, religious congregations, school groups, and tourists.

Among the types of message deposited there are letters (some of those in the Archive of Mourning are still sealed, remaining exactly as they were left at the sites), poems by famous authors and by members of the general public written *ex professo*, narratives of very different kinds, notes and letters of condolence addressed to specific victims, and others addressed to the terrorists responsible for the massacre. The messages are written in many languages and on a wide range of supports: some written directly on the walls themselves, others left on *Post-Its* or even documents, like in the case of a letter of condolence from a Moroccan immigrant written on the back of an official document requesting the renewal of her resident's permit. Frequently the pieces of paper stuck to the walls of the stations and deposited on the shrines came to host dialogues as different authors added to or completed messages that had been left by others (Chulilla et al. 2005: 370). There are many complex and compound texts of this kind, including messages left by groups of teenagers which include signatures from all members of the group. There are also mixed objects that combine photographs, flags, newspaper clippings, and objects as well as works of art that include a large number of drawings.

Heritage, memory and mourning

The cataloguing process of the archive project, which was completed in 2008, was based on the conviction that these manifestations of mourning are an important element in the memorialization of the 11 March bombings. Other records of the attacks, such as police records, documents from the courts and parliament, newspaper articles and official commemorative monuments are usually well documented. With this initiative, grassroots memorials are recognized as part of the long-term 'memory' of the attacks.

The methodological and theoretical problems that underlie the creation of an archive of this kind are a result of the ephemeral nature of the material of which it is comprised, and of a functionality that is exclusively aimed at the present (Gardner and

Henry 2002). A similar situation is discussed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2003) in connection with the materials corresponding to the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York (Sánchez-Carretero 2006: 335). There are a number of important heritage preservation initiatives for this type of material throughout the world, something which attests to the widespread occurrence of grassroots memorials (cf. Doss 2008: 16-17; Gardner 2011). Examples include the archive created in Genoa that is dedicated to the young anti-globalization demonstrator, Carlo Giuliani, killed by the police in July 2001 (Caffarena and Stiacchini 2005), the Smithsonian collections related to September 11 (Gardner and Henry 2002; Gardner 2011), or the collection of the grassroots memorials after the assassination of politician Pim Fortuyn in Amsterdam (Margry 2003, 2011). However, the attempt to turn material that was made to be ephemeral, or to be lost, into a legacy, and thus 'formalize the informal' (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011), raises ethical questions. Without doubt, this is one of the debates that grassroots memorials present to academics concerned with the process of heritage creation in a globalized world.

Many voices can be left out of the 'consensual narratives' that appear after a social trauma and one of the objectives of the research project linked to the Archive of Mourning is to participate reflexively in the construction of these consensual narratives. The mass media, politicians and legal documents will almost certainly form a part of these narratives. For this reason, the presence in time of the ephemeral is essential in order to preserve the 'voices of the others'. Heritage centres such as museums have an important symbolic and semantic power: it is understood that the items preserved in them have been recognized as heritage. In this case, researchers working with grassroots memorials are acting in the opposite direction: not rescuing the past from the present, but rather preserving material that could be considered new heritage, thus leaving space for voices that are normally silenced. Importantly, this project is occurring at a time when our attention as a public is being increasingly called on to consume external grief through the media; a time in which every effort is made to reduce individual grief to a relative minimum, even when mourning the death of loved ones; a time in which the rituals of mourning are simplified and left in the hands of professionals. As this is happening,

we are also witnessing the emergence of new rituals of collective mourning, different ways of expressing grief in the face of traumatic events that are experienced collectively.

Recent research has made it clear that it is possible to refer to a type of contemporary phenomenon, which is growing at a steady rate (at least in the west) and which consists of the anonymous demonstration in public spaces of rituals of mourning in the case of certain deaths, considered as traumatic. Some of these events have led to various forms of documentation or collection initiatives that are studied and/or conserved by universities or academic institutions. In this sense, the ways in which the general public expresses mourning can form a part of a process of 'heritage creation' through which they acquire value, becoming, in the words of Novelo (2005: 86):

'something' that 'someone' considers as worthy of being evaluated, conserved, catalogued, included in an inventory, exhibited, restored, refurbished and admired, and that 'others' should share this choice, freely or through some type of imposition so that the phenomenon of identifying with this 'something' can take shape, so that it is considered as 'our own'.

Notes

- 1 The introduction to the book *Grassroots Memorials. The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death*, edited by Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011), provides a detailed bibliography about various types of grassroots memorial, including a broad selection of references on roadside memorials.
- 2 For a study of the various uses of the terms 'makeshift memorial', 'improvised memorial' and 'spontaneous shrine' see Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011.
- 3 The 'The Archive of Mourning' project was funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Culture (HUM2005-03490) and is part of CRIC (Cultural Heritage and the Reconstruction of Identities after Conflict) funded by the European Union 7FP (Ref. 217411). The participants of the project are members of the CSIC research group GIAP (Anthropological Research Group on Heritage and Traditionalization Processes).
- 4 Margry uses the term 'heritageization' to describe the process of heritage creation (Margry 2011). See also Sánchez-Carretero and Ortiz (2008).
- 5 For information on the stations, the attacks, the number of victims and the ritualization processes in public spaces in Madrid, see Ortiz (2011).

- 6 See their web at www.madridinmemoriam.org.
- 7 The 'cyber shrine' included a computer connected to a larger screen which showed an audiovisual where images of the grassroots memorials were displayed. The computer had a scanner where the hand of the person writing the message could be scanned. In addition, a short message could be written. The cyber shrine was linked to a web page, www.mascercanos.com (no longer available). The almost 60,000 messages of the *Espacio de*

Palabras can be consulted at the Archive of Mourning project.

- 8 Many other 'cyber shrines' and initiatives of this kind were set up. Apart from Madrid in Memoriam, these include: enciendeunavela.wad-net.com; www.lacabramecanica.com/musica/silencio/silencio.htm; dreamers.com/noviolencia and www.imakinarium.net/comic/11.3.4/index.htm.
- 9 The letter can be read at: www.rojoynegro.info/2004/article.php?id_article=1603 (last accessed on 28 October 2009).

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