



MEMORY
STUDIES ASSOCIATION

2019 MSA CONFERENCE REPORT

Third Annual Conference of the Memory Studies Association (MSA), 24-28 June 2019, Madrid

From June 24th to June 28th 2019, about 1500 memory scholars, as well as practitioners – such as memorial staff, artists, human rights activists, transitional justice lawyers – from all over the world came together in Madrid. Attendees of the Third Annual MSA Conference included both junior and senior scholars from a broad range of disciplines, including experimental and social psychology, sociology, political science, history, art history, media studies, cultural studies, literary studies, anthropology and more. Also present were most of the leading figures in the field of memory studies, including Michael Rothberg, Astrid Erll, Ann Rigney, Daniel Levy, Erica Lehrer, Stef Craps, William Hirst, Siobhan Kattago, Wulf Kansteiner and Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, among others. The keynote speakers were the renowned researcher Aleida Assmann (Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2018) and the prestigious writer Viet Thanh Nguyen (Pulitzer Prize in 2016). The conference attracted wide media coverage with over 60 items in national and international newspapers, radio and TV programmes (for a complete overview of the press coverage please have a look at: <https://www.memorystudiesassociation.org/madrid-conference-2019-info-home-3/>).

Hosted at the historical Philology Faculty of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), the conference included 27 roundtables with well-known scholars, 248 panels, over 15 professional development events, as well as a dozen of diverse artistic acts, from performances to film screenings. The conference was organized by the three co-presidents of the MSA, Aline Sierp (Maastricht University), Jenny Wüstenberg (York University Toronto) and Jeffrey Olick

(University of Virginia), as well as an on-site organizing committee comprised of Paco Ferrándiz (CSIC), Marije Hristova (University of Warwick), Johanna Vollmeyer (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and María García Alonso (UNED).

The conference contributed to the MSA's founding goal of providing a platform for communication and diffusion of academic endeavours. This objective, based on the premise that memory studies is receiving growing recognition in academic and policy circles, aims to favour substantial advances in theoretical groundwork, methodological sophistication and professional organization of the increasingly well-known field of memory studies. Furthermore, this conference also marked the further consolidation of the Memory Studies Association as an international platform under whose umbrella already existing smaller scholarly groups and professional networks working on memory issues can co-exist (and collaborate). With the attendance of over 1500 practitioners and scholars, the Annual MSA Conference has proven to be a welcoming environment where experts (be it scholars, practitioners or policy-makers) can share and discuss their findings for the improvement of everybody's work.

Aside from the two main keynotes, the conference provided diverse forums of discussion and shared learning. The complete overview of the programme can be found on our [website](#). Panels followed a format of three-to-five short presentations grouped by thematic focus. The presenters, who submitted their proposals in late 2018, were each asked to stimulate discussion to allow for public engagement with the audience. Panels covered topics such as: memory and theory, memory and the arts, memory concepts, memory regions, memory as a field, combining disciplines, connecting scholars and practitioners, Euro-Centrism in Memory Studies, methodology in Memory Studies, memory and the media, places of memory and places of amnesia.

A number of roundtables served as wider discussion forums, during which key questions facing the Memory Studies field were raised. The Roundtables were: "How to Get Published in Memory Studies" focusing on professional development, especially for young scholars and featuring Claudia Feld, Wulf Kansteiner, Astrid Erll and Jose Brunner (moderated by Jeffrey Olick); "New Approaches to Memory and Museums" which introduced case studies of innovative projects in museums with Iniesta Montserrat, Cathalina Sánchez Escobar, Jean-François Manicom and Karen Worcman (moderated by Claire Taylor); "Las políticas de la

memoria en la España del siglo XXI en el 80 aniversario del final de la Guerra Civil (1939-2019)” with Pablo Sánchez León, Marina Montoto, Emilio Silva, Zira Box, and Rafael Escudero (moderated by Francisco Ferrándiz); and “Connecting Memory Traditions Around the World” with Susannah Radstone, Iyekiyapiwin Darlene St. Clair, Jie-Hyun Lim, Ciraj Rassool and Genner Llanes Ortiz (moderated by Astrid Erll).

The Roundtable discussions revolved around the following questions: What can we do to develop memory studies as a field? How can we decolonise it ? How interdisciplinary can memory studies become? How can memory scholars intervene in current politics, particularly in the light of the current rise of right-wing parties and movements, as well as populist forces, which instrumentalize memory in novel ways? How can memory scholars and practitioners interact in a more fruitful manner?

All four roundtables were recorded and can be watched on www.memorystudiesassociation.org.

In addition to formal events, there were many informal opportunities for networking among conference attendees: during the reception at the start of the conference, during the coffee- and lunch breaks, at the regional and working group meetings, or during the extra activities that were organised such as the masterclasses, the visit to the trenches, or the Valley of the Fallen excursion.

Breaking out of the traditional conference format and asking participants to present short provocative think pieces turned out to be very beneficial for stimulating discussions. Overall, the conference was notable for the spirit of cross- disciplinary exchange and the sense of being engaged in a coalescent moment for the field of Memory Studies. The conference was accompanied by vibrant activity on Twitter and Facebook, and a considerable amount of people watching the livestreams, suggesting a considerable effect beyond Madrid.

Besides the academic objectives of the conference, the organization was also concerned with the accessibility and sustainability of such a big and complex event. In order to make it accessible, the MSA considered diverse hindrances its members could face, from the financial strain of attending an international conference to the language barriers. Regarding the former, the MSA invested around 12 000 euros in travel grants, assigned to early-career researchers with financial difficulty from low income countries to travel to Madrid. To receive this grant, the researchers had to demonstrate that their work would benefit greatly from the opportunity

to meet other researchers in a memory-devoted environment. Second, the MSA organised bilingual (Spanish-English) panels and provided simultaneous interpretation for all speeches, roundtables and panels where necessary. In this way, the Madrid conference bridged the linguistic gap between English- and Spanish-speaking communities of memory studies researchers, and hence opened up a world of new/previously unknown research for many. Last but not least, the MSA provided lunch and coffee breaks throughout the three-day conference to all attendees. This decision was complemented by an arrangement with local charities and foodbanks to reduce waste. These organizations received at the end of each day all the food that had not been consumed by conference attendees. In addition, the MSA offered a child care service for young parents wishing to attend the conference with their children. All these measures were an application of the MSA's commitment to accessibility and sustainability as an international organization that moves thousands of people from all over the world.

The conference was generously supported by the Gobierno de Navarra; George And Irina Schaeffer Center; The Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture; SELMA: Centre for the Study of Storytelling, Experientiality and Memory, Fundación Cultura de Paz, Fundació Solidaritat UB (EUROM), Gogora (Instituto de Memoria y Convivencia de Gobierno Vasco), Universiteitsfond Limburg SWOL, Maastricht University, UNED, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Ministerio de Justicia, CIEMED, IRIS Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur les Enjeux Sociaux.

The next conference will take place in Charlottesville in June 2020. Further information and impressions of the 2019 conference can be found on our [website](#), [facebook](#), [youtube](#) and [twitter](#).