Transnational Sites of Memory – Reconstructing Memory in the City

Aleida and Jan Assmann
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Aleida Assmann held the Chair of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Konstanz from 1993 until her retirement in 2014. Jan Assmann held the Chair of Egyptology at the University of Heidelberg from 1972 until his retirement in 2003.

Over the last decades, the Assmanns have seen that dynamics of collective memory are more likely to be shaped by initiatives and movements from below rather than from the national and supra-national level. For this reason, their research project emphasizes European cities and local actors as the crucial context for the emergence of new memory practices that reshape collective memory and identity in the age of globalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Europe is chosen as a frame and context for the project due to the rich international network of experts, teams, and young researchers available. The project will begin with two Balzan Fellowship holders at Konstanz.

The project will focus on local memory initiatives and activities that are currently evolving in cities but never make it into the news, nor are they noticed or known in neighboring cities. The guiding premise of the project is that citizens today are confronted with a number of memory issues that are reflecting not only radical political changes and a traumatic history, but also cultural, social and technological changes. The city is not defined here in the usual sense as modern, progressive and urban in contrast to the country; both cities and towns in industrial and rural contexts are included in the project. Cities as well as towns can be defined as a condensation of historical events, as a thickening and materialization of history, as tangible carriers of signs and traces that are eventually
destroyed or preserved, discarded or deciphered, marked or unmarked, forgotten or remembered. The emphasis is placed on larger and smaller communities and on the various challenges that these communities face with respect to their collective memories.

Some of the case studies and relevant questions to be addressed by the project include:

- How is the collective memory of the community shaped by its architecture and built environment? How does history materialize in the city? How is it inscribed, anchored, erased, contested, transformed and renewed or reconstructed? Who is participating in these debates, who ignores them, who pays for historical transformations in the city? Which historical layers are privileged and foregrounded, and which are forgotten or repressed?

- Towns and cities are spaces where historical memory is performed, commemorated and contested. What is the role and use-life of monuments in the city? Do they reflect national standards or express local orientations? What is the impact of shifts in the frames of national memory on the local level? What happens if national memory and local memory diverge significantly?

- We have often been told that due to digital technology, the local has become globalized and the global localized. But how does this interrelation really work? To which extent is the global embraced or distanced in the community? Who has access to distant communication and uses these modalities and who does not? How are digital means used to create new collective memories on the local level?

- In a time of mass migration it is not the country as such but the city and the town that are impacted by these dramatic changes. How is the collective memory of the community affected by the arrival and presence of new citizens? Which memories do the immigrants bring with them and do they find ways and means to share them with the other inhabitants?

These and other questions may provide more insight into the complex relations between memory, space, time, and identity in times of rapid transformation. The city is an important focus of the project because it is the exemplary contact zone where people from different nations and distant cultures interact face to face. It is by no means a ‘melting pot’, but a paradigmatic contact zone where heterogeneous social and cultural imaginaries are defended, contested, communicated and negotiated in confined space.

The first workshop was organized in June 2018 at the Institute of Advanced Study in Berlin, where the projects were presented and members and met with scholars working in similar fields, such as Prof. Viktoria Sereda from Kiev and Prof. Pawel Machiewicz
from Warsaw. Another workshop was held in the spring of 2019 at the University of Sankt Gallen in order to exchange ideas and sound out possibilities of cooperation with Prof. Ulrich Schmid and his group working on eastern European cities. In November 2018, the members of the Assmanns’ group organized a conference on *Contested Memory in Urban Space. Materiality, Traces, and Monuments in Global Contexts*, the proceedings of which will be published in Memory Studies Series, Palgrave Macmillan. In August 2019, a summer school, *Urban Change and Memory. New Perspectives on Europe and Beyond*, was held.

Each member of the Assmanns’ group published articles, edited books, gave lectures and engaged in various activities in the field of their respective projects; they were able to secure financial means to continue from other foundations. The Covid-19 pandemic forced the group to meet online and suspend workshops and visiting lectureships temporarily. The publication of edited volumes is planned, and a number of articles have already appeared or are in print.

**Publications and Academic Activities**

**Gruia Badescu**

**Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles**


Books


Book Chapters


Invited Talks and Roundtables
Architecture and “Coming to Terms with the Past”: Post-War Reconstruction in Belgrade and Sarajevo, University of Cambridge, 22 January 2019.


Selected Conference Papers


Between Radical and Reflective Reconstruction: Ruins, Rebuilding, and Dealing with the Past in Post-Yugoslav Cities. International Conference of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA): Destruction/ (Re-)construction Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cultural Heritage in Conflict, October 2019, Beirut.


**Ulrike Capdepón**

**Edited Volumes and Special Issues**

Museums, Memory and Memorialization in Urban Space, Special Issue: History & Memory, Indiana University Press, edited with Dr. Jill Strauss, and Dr. Aline Sierp, Vol. 32, No. 1.


**Peer Reviewed Contributions**

“Challenging the Symbolic Representation of the Franco Dictatorship: The Street


**Book Chapters**


“La “Querella Argentina” y la represión franquista: memorias locales, procesos de justicia transnacionales y “efectos rebote”” [The Argentine Complaint and Francoist


Keynotes and Invited Lectures

“Monumentality and Representation of the Dead in Urban Space.” Investigación y Estudios de Posgrado, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Benemérita. Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico (invited by Prof. Arturo Aguirre), November 26, 2019.

“Exile, Memory and Accountability: Transnational Human Rights Prosecutions in the Southern Cone of Latin America and Spain”, International Congress: Lives in Motion: Migration, Exile, and Memory between Europe and Latin America, Colegio de México (Colmex), DAAD, Mexico City, November 21-22, 2019.
“Memory, Transitional Justice and Human Rights Discourses from the Southern Cone of Latin America to Spain. Perspectives on Transnational Entanglements and Learning Effects.” Special Session Invited Speaker, Panel with Glenda Mezzarobba: Facultade de Direito, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Brazil (invited by Prof. Britta Weiffen), November 19, 2019.

“Monumentalidad y representación simbólica de los muertos: El “Memorial del Detenido Desaparecido y del Ejecutado Político” en el Cementerio General (Santiago) y el “Memorial a las víctimas de la Guerra Civil” en el cementerio de la Almudena (Madrid).” Symposium: Testimonio y culturas de la memoria en Alemania y Chile, Universidad de Santiago de Chile (USACH), Instituto de Estudios Avanzados (IDEA), Santiago, Chile, September 3-5, 2019.


Accepted Conference Papers


“The Street Name Debates in Sao Paulo and Madrid as Memory Practices ‘from Below’,” Latin American Studies Association (LASA), Annual Conference, Boston (USA), May 24-27, 2019.


for Political Research (ECPR), General Conference, Hamburg University, Germany, August 22-25, 2018.


Tour Guide for the excursions to the Valley of the Fallen as part of the Memory Studies Association (MSA) Conference at the Complutense University in Madrid, June 29, 2019 (in English).


Menschenrechte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Forschung und Praxis. Roundtable open to the public, University of Kassel, July 6, 2018 (in German).

Conference Organization
Panel: The Struggle for Remembrance. Transformed Memory Constructions in Postdictatorship Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. International Federation for Public History (IFPH), Berlin (with Prof. Raina Zimmering, accepted, postponed to 2021).

Panel: Remembering Absence: Memorializing Trauma in Contested Spaces. Fourth Annual Conference, Memory Studies Association (MSA), Charlottesville, USA (accepted, postponed to the Annual Conference in Warsaw 2021).

International Summer Seminar: Urban Change and Memory. New Perspectives on Europe and Beyond, with 16 invited international PhD and Masters students, Cluster for Excellence Cultural Foundations of Integration, University of Konstanz (organized by the Balzan Prize research group). August 2019.

Internal Meeting and project presentations of the Balzan Prize Research Group Members at the Cluster of Excellence, University of Konstanz. May 2019.


Three-day International Workshop: Contested Memory in the City (with Sarah Dornhof and Piotr Kisiel), Kulturwissenschaftliches Kolleg, Cluster of Excellence, University of Konstanz. November 2018.


**Piotr Kisiel**

Conference Papers (publication forthcoming)


*Factories, Palaces and Temples: Minorities in Urban Narrative of a Post-Industrial City,* presented at the workshop Contested Memories in the City at the University Konstanz (22-24 November 2018).


Ann-Sophie Schoepfel

Articles


Interviews
“Boat People Rescue Operation and Memory. Interview with Anh Tuan Dinh-Xuan, a Franco-Vietnamese medical doctor at Parisian Cochin Hospital.” Available on the Balzan research blog on new memory practices in the age of globalization and migration Reconstructing Memory in European Cities. https://memcit.hypotheses.org/915.

“Vietnamese Democratic Struggle and Memory Making in Liège. Interview with Le
Huu Dao, President of the Vietnamese Community of Liège.” Available on the Balzan research blog on new memory practices in the age of globalization and migration Reconstructing Memory in European Cities. https://memcit.hypotheses.org/907.