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Mobilising memoryscapes. Tourist entanglements at two Catalan Civil War sites

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Abstract

This paper's ambition is to explore how the material, social and symbolic legacy of conflicts that have taken place since the turn of the 20th century may be made more resonant and comprehensible to visitors. We take the Spanish Civil War sites in Catalonia as emblematic of the issues and entrenchments which to date hinder their full potential as sites of reconciliation, awareness and identity-shaping for Europeans. After analysing their current situation and embedding in place strategies, which is remarkably different – one in a peripheral mountain location and one in the very core of Barcelona's touristscape –, our research

examines the way in which historical memory is constructed, narrated and practiced in those spaces, underlining unsolved issues and contradictions. In retrospect, this research contributes to the critique of the very concept of historical memory, its patrimonialisation and the modes of social construction of heritage in the 'age of mobilities'.

Key Words: Historical Memory, Spanish Civil War, Catalonia, Heritage, Landscape, Tourism

1. Introduction

As underlined by the joint agreement stipulated in 2007 between the Council of Europe and the European Union (Council of Europe and European Union, 2007), international tourism, and more in general the free mobility of Europeans, can become a vehicle for consolidating European identity insofar as it fosters the recognition and identification of Europe's richly layered history, bonding citizens around values and narratives which they can share, while at the same time bringing about opportunities for regional development. As further affirmed by the Baku declaration, adopted at the Council of Europe (CoE) Cultural Routes' annual Forum on 31st October 2014, and recalling the Faro convention and the European landscape convention, "audiences are invited to contribute to their understanding and interpretation as well as to share their own memories, thereby becoming co-producers […] of common European history" (Council of Europe, 2014, p. 4).

One such layer is the legacy of the 20th century conflicts: war memorials, battlefields, histories of extermination and diaspora, defeat and resistance, and many other elements that have become encrusted to the landscape throughout the European space. The EU project is strongly rooted in the values and reforms that allowed to get over these dramatic events and to 'vaccinate' States and citizens against their reproduction, and these landscapes present powerful narratives of what all Europeans should be up against to and in favour of (Bottici, 2008). Yet circumstances call for continuous reinvigorating of this social and political ideal (Delanty, 2018). The recent resurgence of conflicts at the edges of Europe, the new tensions and populisms within member countries, and the centrifugal forces which threaten to weaken the achievements of decades, move the Union to seek for fresh initiatives to liven up the post-war spirit.

Thus, both at European and national level, great emphasis (and funding) has been given to site rehabilitation and management strategies which speak a universal language, through narratives which relate pasts events with the present and future of our living together (see for instance European Commission, 2014). Such initiatives are mainly elicited in the educational and cultural field; yet, increasingly, they are also played out in the framework of a 'tourist Europe', recognised as a key dimension of social and intercultural bonding, but also a reflection of the unbounded right of mobility of Europeans across national frontiers, in itself a fundamental achievement (Servillo et al., 2012). Memorial sites of the Great War are among the most popular European attractions (Irimiás, 2014; Vanneste & Foote, 2012), while more recent initiatives attempt at unearthing some of the most controversial memories of World War II and of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century for responsible tourism (Battilani et al., 2018; Bird et al., 2016). However, other conflicts carrying with them wounds still not

totally healed have largely eschewed such efforts. Among these, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) is to this date a very problematic field for reconciliation, for reasons that will be clarified in this work.

Faced with this, the present article intends to contribute to the academic reflection about tourism at contested heritage sites, tying in with the broader debate on the social production of historical memory. Our main objective is to analyse how political and ideological entrenchments are preventing such contested heritage to be made more resonant and comprehensible to visitors, thus liberating its full potential for understanding and value creation. To do so, we examine, first, how the Civil War memorial heritage is presented and territorialized at two emblematic sites in Catalonia; and secondly, how it is experienced, perceived and negotiated in such contexts by different audiences, whose lives may or may not be directly or indirectly tied to them.

The paper is so structured: in the next section we provide an overview of different strands of the literature that allow us to frame the role of tourism in the process of construction and valorisation of historical memory. Then we introduce the methodological framework of our research, followed by an illustration of the context of the two case study areas, within a broader account of the current tensions in the Spanish territorial model and of Catalonia's national identity construction. Section five illustrates and discusses our findings. The sixth section concludes with some further reflections on memorial policy in the tourism context and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Points of entry: historical memory, territorialization and mobilization

Different strands of literature are referenced to deepen our research. A first theoretical standpoint concerns historical memory as social construction. Following Mead's (1929) definition of 'the nature of the past', this analytic approach conceives the past not as an objective entity, but as the result of a process of selection, re-elaboration and reinterpretation of events of the past entuned to the needs of the present, with a view to the re-production of national and other collective identities, sustained through a great amount of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006), which includes some actors and political structures and excludes others. In the words of Slavoj Žižek (2016), "the future is fixed, but the past depends on how we construct it". This approach serves to examine and disentangle certain readings of the past and understand their sociocultural framings, or to analyse 'oppositional' interpretations. The memorialisation of conflicts, colonial dominations or historical biographies thus becomes the object of discursive strategies, upheld by nation states to reaffirm their role and authority and heightening victory above loss in order to bring forward a sense of national cohesion around these values and histories (Zerubavel, 2003); or by postcolonial states, cultural minorities and political coalitions promoting narratives which simultaneously challenge the violence of the state and nuance alternative local or global imaginaries (Hite, 2013). Recalling Ryan (2007), "where commemoration (of battlefields) has emerged from a bottom-up rather than a top-down drive for recognition, then the interpretations may well be sites of resistance to the dominant myths and structures of a society." (p. 6). Such resistance may well be the hybrid product of fragmentary appropriations (Manoukian, 2002, p. 9); instead than heightening oppositional narratives, thus, a genuine

move towards a (re)construction of shared memory requires their dedoxification (Mellino, 2005, p. 127).

Another point of entry of this paper is to recognise, following Halbwachs (1992), *space* as the main source fathoming the continuity and stability of a social group. Space is also socially constructed as *territory* characterized by historical, cultural, technical, and political-economic origins (Elden, 2010), and *territorialization* is the process by which specific territorial strategies are deployed by various actors to produce bounded and controlled territories that allow governing people and resources located within and around them (Scott, 1998). In this sense the 'memorialization' of historical events is closely associated to territory formation (or transition) and has a strong spatial dimension. While territory and territorialization nuance political projects, the canvas of places/histories which are the object of such strategies could be conceived as *memoryscapes*, in which the commemoration of warfare and war events is scripted in physical elements, texts and memorial events (preserved historic battlegrounds, plaque markers, war monuments and museums, commemorative war ceremonies). The territorialization of memoryscapes thus carves the past onto material space as platforms on which memory of a historical event may be collectively evoked (Muzaini, 2006, p. 212), allowing this heritage to stretch out to the post-war period and contemporary environments, their material construction and socio-economic configuration. Memoryscapes comprise a multiplicity of forms and motivations of remembering, both textual and performative, cohering into new creolised forms, within which individuals – including tourists – negotiate a plurality of allegiances and identifications (Basu, 2013: 116). In this sense, and of primary importance for this paper, memoryscapes are dynamically modified, both semantically and materially, by the intervention of different agents. According to Hernàndez i Marti (2006), processes of *deterritorialization* are closely associated to the 'mediatization' of heritage, a fundamental dimension of cultural globalization. Tourism plays a central part in this as one of the main channels through which local heritage reaches a global realm, and thus is transformed into global heritage.

The 'deterritorializing' role of tourism is tackled by recent academic contributions that analyse tourism as practice and performance of mobility with constitutive powers over space (Minca and Oakes, 2014). This perspective understands tourism as intermeshed with the heterogenous mobilities that frame contemporary societies, and a fundamental force that assembles a broad array of social, political, economic, cultural, and material processes (Franklin, 2003). Studying tourists and their engagements with other fixed and non-fixed elements of the territory is thus an adequate way to make sense of it in an age in which society is fundamentally mobile (Urry, 2000; Sheller & Urry, 2004). Therefore, the analysis of the tourist as performer of the memoryscape unpacks the relational essence of such spaces, allowing us to explore how the experience of memorial sites is collectively produced and how meanings and values are ultimately negotiated as 'heritage from below' (Robertson, 2008), in practice and in situ, possibly stretching beyond the purely memorialist domain (Muzaini & Minca, 2018). In this framework, tourism constitutes one of the main means for experiential encounters with commemorative sites, and "generates a set of practices that mark and make such sites as meaningful and historically salient for both individuals and broader communities of belonging" (Sather-Wagstaff, 2016, p. 39). Understanding this process requires a serious

consideration of the interconnected roles that experientiality, along with material and visual culture, plays in the social construction of memory, historicity, place-making, and tourism itself.

These entry points are used to frame our analysis of how the events of the Civil War are memorialised at two sites in Catalonia. We focus on the tensions between territorialization as political project, and the different roles that tourism plays in this process. In this sense, the two case studies examined offer an intriguing contrast. In both cases there is untapped potential for a greater engagement of tourists and more opportunities for sustainable local development, yet the contextual conditions and encasing in place strategies are totally different.

3. Methodology

Our examination of how the Civil War is memorialised and played out for and by tourists has focused on two highly illustrative sites, both for their historical relevance, and because they represent two very different cases in the context of tourism development trends in Catalonia. The first, the Memorial Spaces of the Ebro Battle, mostly in Corbera d'Ebre, Terra Alta county, attracts mostly special interest audiences with a familiar or ideological attachment to the site; nevertheless, the involvement of the local community in the memorialization of the site 'from below' is quite limited. The other, that of Barcelona's S. Felip Neri square, is the result of an ongoing process of unearthing of the wartime and post-war struggles by the local community, possibly a process of 'local' identity affirmation within the context of an increasingly mediatized mass-tourist landscape. This allows to derive comparative insights about different models of social construction of memory – highly influenced by the territorial context – and the way they resonate with tourist audiences.

In these two sites we have carried out extensive fieldwork between October 2016 and September 2017. Weekends have been reserved to the fieldwork in Corbera, while Barcelona offers an adequate presence of people also at weekdays. Field research tasks included in the first place an analysis of the sites through their physical setting – exemplified by parameters such as location, relationship with the surrounding area, climate and walkability, as well as the characteristics of the soil itself – and their enactments, perceptions and representations (Ingold, 2000), including the narrative approaches at the two sites, such as museum displays and other interpretative materials, tour guides and guidebooks presentations, and memorialist events.

Then we proceeded with unstructured interviewing (Russell Bernard, 2006, p. 211) to randomly approached visitors (either individuals or taking part in organised tours), as well as to tour guides, site managers, and representatives of community associations and other civic entities; we engaged in participatory observation as embedded in group tours (with the tourism company Terra Enllà in Corbera d'Ebre and with a guide, Nick Lloyd, in Barcelona). In Corbera, notes were taken after approaching individual or group visitors, who generally just answered our questions, while we have taken recordings of the activity during guided tours, in which context no direct question could be asked to participants. Besides, we transcribed conversations with local stakeholders. In Barcelona's Plaça S. Felip Neri, tourists and tour guides had no problem in being interviewed with the presence of a recording device,

while residents preferred not to be recorded but they allowed us to take notes while they were talking.

Globally, we interviewed 78 people between individual tourists and participants to guided tours, of which 26 in St. Philip Neri Square and 52 in Corbera d'Ebre, 8 community stakeholders and 2 site managers. Throughout this paper, references to interviews and field notes have been coded (respectively with IN and FN and indicating the date), and interlocutors have mostly been left anonymous. The analysis of the results has been accomplished in the frame of the hermeneutic, narrative and discourse analysis (Russell Bernard, 2006, p. 451), according to the standpoint of interpretative anthropology.

4. Tourists at Civil War memorial sites in Catalonia: Historical and Territorial Context

Between 1936 and 1939, Spain's legitimate government, the Second Republic, was attacked by the rebel forces led by General Francisco Franco, who, after three years of conflict, eventually took power and established a 40-year totalitarian regime. The historical importance of the Spanish Civil War goes well beyond Spain itself, as proved, on one side, by the involvement of a first international volunteer army (the International Brigades) as well as of the Soviets, and, on the other, by the more or less explicit intervention of 'friendly' fascist regimes (German and Italian), who, according to historians, played a crucial role in the development of the conflict and tested their warfare capacity then leading to the Second World War (Lo Cascio, 2013, p. 14).

After the death of Franco in 1975, Spain went through a long period of adaptation to the democratic political climate of the rest of Western Europe. That period, called Transition (1975-1982), sought to bring about a 'levelling ground' for the construction of a national democracy based on the widest social and political consensus, of which the recognition of regional autonomy was a pillar. Yet it carried with it shortcomings and contradictions, which are held responsible for many of the problems of contemporary Spain (Conversi, 2002). These frictions were critically heightened when, in the wake of 2008's financial meltdown, the new conservative government started to re-centralise some of its competences, leading to an ongoing standstill with the Catalan government.

Indeed, the claims of an 'incomplete' transition to democracy have to do with the absence of formal amendments to the deeds of the past regime (Molinero, 2010; Reig Tapia, 2009), a process which has been successfully undertaken by other countries (Germany, Italy, many post-soviet countries, former Yugoslavian nations, etc.). In fact, the "Amnesty Law" of 1977 shields crimes against civil rights committed during Franco's regime from being put under trial. The goal of this law was to facilitate the Transition in a time when the division in the Spanish society was still very strong (Aguilar & Fernández, 2002), yet eventually it came to be seen as a hindrance to the restoration of the dignity of the victims – thousands are still buried in unknown locations, and even survivors have never been cleared of political sentences for insurrectional activities, or their families compensated. For this reason, the law became famous as "Pacto del Olvido" (Oblivion Pact). As one of our interviewees in Barcelona claims:

> Historical memory has been simplified, preserved with a lot of mistakes; political

> power just puts nameplates, on the ground, where bars have their terraces, and that's not enough. Historical memory has not been sufficiently analysed, it has been neglected in the interest of both Francoists and Communists, who both killed a lot of people. [IN Feb 8, 2017]

Under mounting societal demand, in 2007 a new *Law of Historical Memory* was promoted by Zapatero's government in an attempt to 'mobilise' and operationalise historical memory. However, it was marred by the unsolid grounds of power entrenchments of the 2000s, and, with the Amnesty Law still in force, its effects have been much shorter than the stated goals. In the words of the chief historian of the Interpretation Centre of the Ebro Battle memorial site, «the memory of our war has no continuity, no basis, we haven't either asked ourselves the key questions: historical memory has no room in this country» [IN Oct 4, 2016]. Only very recently (2018), the Law of Historical Memory has been revamped and reformed, leading to an historical decision to remove Franco's burial site from the 'Memorial of the Fallen', remarkably, one of the few real 'visitor attractions' – and a highly controversial one – left by the pre-democratic territorialization of the Civil War (Smith, 2007).

While the shortcomings of the Transition and the entrenchments with historical memory regard the whole Spanish society, in the recent political conjuncture this has become a discursive pillar of the mounting confrontation between Catalonia and the central State. Catalan institutions identify themselves with the once-defeated Republic, a secular, socialist-leaning state, and the ultimate victim of Franco's dictatorship; while connotating Spain as the heir of Franco's regime (the 'regime of 1978', as it is commonly called in the current political debate). This is arguably a narrow and roughly-cut reading of history, yet one that stays with the memorial ideology of the post-war. In occasion of the patched-up referendum for independence that took place on October 1, 2017, supporters would portray this confrontation as – in the words of a scholar we interviewed – «an ongoing transition, because what we are subject to nowadays is still a fascist regime» [IN Sep 27, 2017].

The 'unsolved' issues of the Civil War emerge regularly in the everyday: hints, jokes, references, dominate the everyday. Emotional implications are plenty. One of our interviewees, recalling the terrible events that took place in her village during the conflict while walking up a hill, suddenly exclaimed: «You just can't do everything at the same time, going up, talking and being moved!» [FN, Nov 19, 2016]. Obviously, members of the affected communities feel the need to talk about what happened. Dolores, a 82-year-old woman, expressed the need to find the remains of her father, killed in the bombing in Calaceite in 1937, «now that they are reopening old wounds» [FN, Aug 29, 2018]. But most of all, they need to find a common ground that permits a healthy confrontation over this contested past. As one of the site managers of Corbera's memorial sites told us: «to what extent can we really talk about justice? We have to ask ourselves those questions. Not because there is an answer, but because this is the debate we didn't have the chance to have before» [IN, Nov 19, 2016]. Contested memory is on both sides however, and while some of the 'unionists' in Catalonia (a slightly majoritarian section of the voters in the most recent regional elections) value the 'silent' pacification accomplished with the Transition, others claim against the political and cultural specificity of Catalonia. Francisco, a former sailor and the owner of an antiques shop

in Tarragona, told us: «What you are doing, you university researchers, restless republicans, is trying to win a war that you have already lost» [FN, Jun 21, 2017].

In this complex and highly politicized context, some institutions have developed a meticulous work of revindication and promotion of the historical memory during and after the Civil War (Remesar Betlloch & Ricart Ulldemolins, 2014). The most important is the *Memorial Democratic de Catalunya*, a governmental body created in 2006 to preserve and valorise democratic memory, and concretely the memory of the Second Republic, the republican government of Catalonia, the Civil War and its victims, as well as the victims of repression, exile and deportation during and after Franco's regime. In addition, many municipalities, starting with Barcelona, have taken up memorialising emblematic sites of warfare or resistance, in an attempt to unearth collective memory 'erased' by urban development. The organised civil society and grassroots entities are also very active on this front. Associations of the victims and their families, antifascist political collectives as well as neighbours' associations regularly organise memorial activities and advocate for political action. Although tourists are not the primary target of these efforts, this narrative does reach the abundant tourist population of Catalonia, especially at the most popular sites, sometimes attracting their sympathy and pushing them to take an active part in demonstrations or to take the sides of the Catalan cause on social networks. Information campaigns, even in some cases institutional ones, are always careful to depict Catalonia as 'different from Spain', a state-less nation struggling for freedom (as for instance in the contested – and sanctioned – display of national symbols at football sport events, e.g. the international matches of F.C. Barcelona). Tourists are expected to "have a degree of empathy with the quest for greater autonomy from Spain [and therefore to] become vehicles for the transmission of a political cause" (Breen et al., 2016. p. 8).

The efforts to mobilise memorial sites in Catalonia as visitor attractions must be placed in the wider context of tourism development in this region. Catalonia is the Spanish autonomous community receiving the highest numbers of international tourists (more than 19 million in 2017), spending on average 169€ a day, and generating direct employment for 379,000, the 13.6% of the Catalan workforce (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, 2009). It is no wonder then that tourism is not only an important facet of Catalonia, but also has strategic social importance, as it was proved when after the financial meltdown of 2008 thousands of Catalans lost their jobs, while tourism maintained its market shares and levels of occupation.

Catalonia has a long history of tourism development, mainly focused on 'sea and sand' tourism on the coast, and, more recently, on the city of Barcelona, which, after the 1992 Olympics and the subsequent urban reforms, has turned into a global destination. Yet, in the last few years the increasing pressure of the visiting population on public spaces, services and housing has produced a veritable 'tourism crisis' in the Catalan capital, strengthening exclusionary trends and causing resentment among the resident population (Blanco-Romero et al., 2018). In 2015, a grassroots coalition won the municipal elections, promising a radical turn in the management of tourism (Russo & Scarnato, 2017). As part of this approach, the new government is keen on giving back to citizens the power of representation and control over their own livelihoods and shared histories, including the memory of the Civil War, which

in Barcelona alone caused an estimated 2,700 casualties (only 2,000 identified) plus tens of thousands of displaced, exiled and incarcerated during the subsequent regime.

In the broader regional context, the traditional Catalan tourist model is today at a crossroads. Faced with the increasing obsolescence of the traditional '3s' resorts, and with mounting competition of emerging destinations at the edges of the EU, the Catalan administration is actively supporting initiatives of product innovation and diversification, which of necessity take in the activation of secondary cities, smaller towns and rural and mountain areas in the Catalan interior (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2013), like Terra Alta in our study. Inland areas arguably provide additional value to established coastal destinations and larger cities as destinations for hub-and-spoke visits; eventually, that would trigger a process of building up attractiveness and services for hosting visitors in peripheral areas, reverting depopulation trends and their generally unfavourable economic situation. This line of work, which in the past used EU rural and social development funds, has recently shifted to the new EU 'smart specialization' funding context (RIS3), spurring a new wave of diagnoses of territorial 'points of excellence'. In various areas in the Catalan outback, these efforts target the synergetic relations between local produces (e.g. wine and food), embedded territorial knowledge, heritage, and tourism.

5. Results from the fieldwork

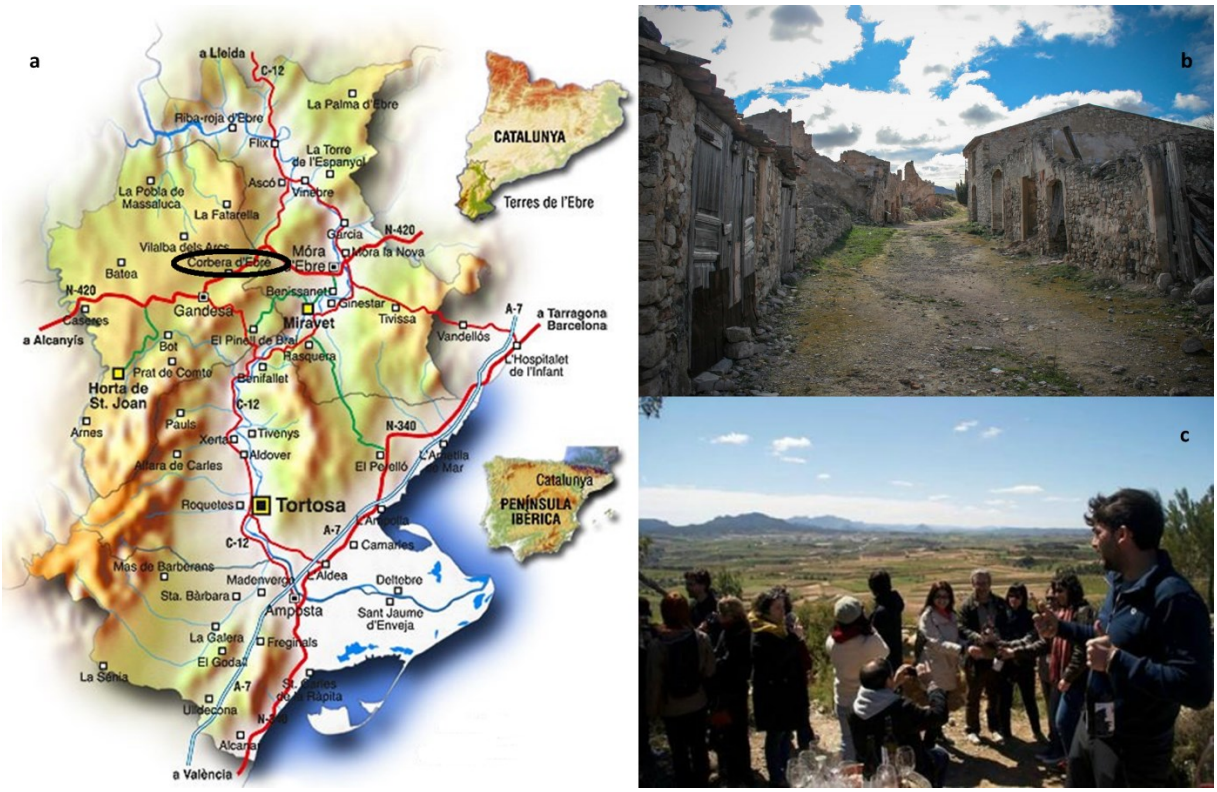
Corbera d'Ebre: a divisive memory

The 'Memorial Spaces of the Ebro Battle' (*Espais de la Memòria de la Batalla de l'Ebre*, henceforth EMBE) is a network of sites and interpretation spaces managed by the COMEBE consortium, situated in the Terra Alta county. They include the *Poble Vell* (Old Village) of Corbera d'Ebre, a whole town destroyed by bombs in the Ebro Battle and left in ruins, now towering over the reconstructed new town, and including a partially refurbished church which serves as exhibition space; and the Interpretation Centre of the '115 Days', also in Corbera, illustrating the historical context, development and regional legacy of the battle through the interpreted display of objects, audio-visuals, maps, and documents. Besides, the EMBE includes other 4 thematic 'interpretation centres' and 20 sites scattered around the county, in towns and rural land, including trenches, shelters, fortification, ruins, memorials, as well as a medieval castle that served as the headquarters of the Francoist army. Visitors to EMBE sites make base in Corbera for visiting the other sites, however the great majority limits their visits to the *Poble Vell* or at the 115 Days Centre.

The *Poble Vell* is a key testimony of the material occurrences of the Civil War. The tangible, visible nature of the ruins provides a formidable opportunity to experience devastation 'hands on', with the further aid of the interpretative script offered by the 115 Days Centre nearby (Fig. 1b). However, it is also a remote place for visitors, both mentally and materially. Terra Alta is a peripheral place in Catalonia, lying at a distance from all the most important tourist emission centres: 2½ hours driving from Barcelona, and 1 hour from the *Costa Daurada* resort area, on winding mountain roads (Fig. 1a). Public transport is scarce, there are no train

connections to the county itself, and the closest middle-sized city is Tortosa, 30 minutes away.

Figure 1a: map of Terra Alta county; b: the *Poble Vell* of Corbera d'Ebre; c: wine tasting at 'Cota 402'



Its amplitude is part of its appeal, offering a stark contrast with the tightly urbanised areas on the coast. As recalled in the previous section, Terra Alta has become the focus of initiatives aimed at diversifying the core tourist products and providing new development opportunities in inner areas. Yet these efforts have had limited success so far, except possibly for the Via Verda, a 50-km hiking and biking route using an abandoned railway line, which sees as a lot of activity by Catalan excursionists, especially during the weekends and in shoulder seasons. Wine tourism also has potential, however its development remains embryonic to date. In spite of the value of its memorialist heritage, the town of Corbera hardly matches a visitor destination image: there are no speciality shops, no restaurants, and «there is basically nothing to see» [FN, Oct 4, 2016] except for a first-class winery, Frisach, which is quite an important actor in the narration of the war landscape, as it uses one of the most emblematic Ebro Battle landmarks – a view point and air shelter called 'Cota 402' (quota 402) – as the site for wine tasting and interpreting the terroir savoured through the wine (Fig. 1c). This image is further influenced by the barren landscape, by its nature of border region, as well as by the inward-looking character of the local population and the forsaken appearance of its villages, characterised by strong depopulation and ageing.

Arguably, one of the reasons for this lack of development is, beyond its peripherality, also the apparent lack of interest of local stakeholders to become a tourist place, and less so on account of its contested war heritage. It was pointed out in several occasions during our fieldwork that the Ebro Battle and the post-war events are still pretty much a divisive,

contested history in Terra Alta. The battle left important scars in the landscape – not just physical, but also social: while devastation, diaspora and hunger have obliterated a large part of the republican party, reducing critically the 'social capital' that could have engaged in a revindication of its legacy in the present times, members of the other party have settled in this area after the war, someway managing to conserve their social status long after the restoration of democracy. One of our interviewees clarified that this peculiar social context did not really allow open conversation and reconciliation. The 'Oblivion Pact' is still very much the way the local community relates to it; hence the reluctance to open up further this narrative to outsider audiences. «If we don't talk about these events among us, how do you think we could talk about them with visitors?» [FN, Feb 15, 2016].

Site management at Corbera is provided by two main stakeholders. The first is COMEBE (Ebro Battle Spaces Memorialist Consortium), created in 2001 by initiative of the local administrations of the region, and integrating over time new members, like the Catalan government and other 15 municipalities of the Terra Alta and Ribera d'Ebre counties. It employs seven people, including a tour guide and four wardens, and receives funding mainly from the Catalan administration (77% in the 2015 budget), from own activities and ticket sales (10.1%), while the rest comes from member municipalities and the county administration. In the network of centres and sites that it manages, COMEBE aims at "recovering the memory and raising awareness of the events and places involved in the Ebro Battle, [making them] easier to visit and understand" (Centre d'Interpretació 115 Dies, 2019). Nevertheless, its target audience are those who are already familiar with the context of the conflict. As a matter of fact, it is a stated intention of COMEBE to serve for those who have a personal relationship with the Ebro Battle. The head manager of COMEBE has been explicit with us about their visitor strategy:

> (we aim at) a memorialist tourism which is not historical, but personal. The question is: do we want to change this? If so, we would lose part of our essence, of our project: because this is not about tourism, it has nothing to do with tourism. It is personal, sentimental. [IN Nov 19, 2016]

This strategy eschews concerns for local development and does not see 'generalist' tourism as a potential public. The contextualization that would be needed by a foreign visitor, was for instance lacking in a grass-root private exhibition visited during our fieldwork, *"La Trinxera"*, organised by a local collector, featuring objects related to the Ebro Battle collected privately during years of research in the surrounding area without any kind of explanation.

The second main stakeholder at Corbera is an association of residents of the *Poble Vell*. It is directly responsible for the conservation of the *Poble Vell* site, using funds from the Catalan Government and the European Union, and manages access to the site and the income from ticketing. One of the key interpretative projects supported by this association is the 'Spelling Book of Freedom', involving the material realization of a vocabulary by local artists, with letters encrusted in art works and texts scattered all around the site, which offers an intriguing perspective over the mundanity of destruction and lost freedom.

Another relevant actor intervening in the activation of historical memory at the EMBE sites is *Terra Enllà* ('land beyond'), a private tour company whose market target is clearly tourists.

The two partners of *Terra Enllà* are a journalist and historian with deep knowledge of contemporary conflicts like the Spanish Civil War, and an anthropologist with a focus on sociocultural dynamics, education and civil rights. Their tours start at *Poble Vell*, where groups (usually 15-20 participants) are offered an introduction to the history of the place during a walking tour, ask questions, and are given some time to take photos at the most suggestive sites. In their narratives, *Terra Enllà* is keen to elicit a vivid and 'quotidian' sense of history, presenting the Civil War and the Ebro Battle events within the wider context of the Terra Alta landscape, practiced through wine tasting, kayak tours on the Ebro river and hiking tours. For instance, their tour '*memòria a peu i a taula* (memory by foot and at the table), in collaboration with a local restaurant, is a walk through memorialist sites, ending with a meal designed to reflect what soldiers and civil population ate during the war: participants are given the possibility to *taste* the scantiness and the recourse to creativity at the table in that historical period.

Paying visitors at EMBE sites, as counted in official statistics (not necessarily including those who only visit the *Poble Vell*, without stopping at the EMBE Interpretation centres) were around 11,000 yearly in 2016 (COMEBE, n.d.). Local school groups and organised tours make up for approximately a quarter of these each, while the remaining half are individual visitors. Groups and individuals tend to include people with a specific bonding to these sites and the events they represent, mainly from the proximity and the larger Catalan cities (some 85%), but also in fewer numbers from the rest of Spain (10%) and from foreign countries (5%). The global numbers and mix, as well as the origins, haven't changed substantially over the last 5 years.

Non-Catalan visitors generally have original family links with the place and the subsequent diaspora or other events of the post-war period; among foreign visitors, a sizeable share includes International Brigades veterans and (increasingly) their kin, as well as members of international resistance movements and people with a general political leaning to the left; the exception is that of 'war buffs', people with a technical interest in warfare and combat tactics. This kind of public is especially present in occasion of memorial events, such as the day of International Brigades, or the Nameplate Ceremony (commemorating those who went missing during the Ebro Battle), which we attended on November 19, 2016. During those events, the whole landscape is visited, underlining its relevance beyond individual sites, including the *Poble Vell*, which is but a short stop in a longer visit. A middle-aged man who came with his wife from Puertollano (Castile-La Mancha), told us the story of his uncle, who died in the Ebro Battle, naming places in the surrounding area and constantly pointing at them with his arms [FN, Nov 19, 2016]. Visitor practices in this area and especially during memorial events are marked by the high emotional burden of events that have not been collectively healed. Members of different visitor groups were observed exchanging opinions, taking pictures and familiarising.

Moreover, *Poble Vell* represents an attraction for individual visitors, who come to the site mainly because it is "something that they always wanted to do, and they finally had the chance to" [FN from various field-work dates], and because there is a strong will to rediscover the history of Catalonia. Those visitors, usually families or small groups of 2 to 5

members from the surrounding area, generally stay for a couple of hours; yet their engagement with the landscape is limited to a short walk through the bomber village site, and hardly extends to the nearby Interpretation Centre.

All in all, visitors are few and international or 'generalist' tourists even fewer. This is not surprising in the context of a region (Terres de l'Ebre, including the Terra Alta county together with other 3 counties in the south of Catalonia) that welcomes around 375,000 tourists a year, mostly concentrated in the coastal areas. However, one would expect that given the historical relevance and uniqueness of the EMBE sites, the interest that contemporary history is starting to assume with the new generations of tourists, and the fact that the Catalan Tourism Board is actively promoting 'off the beaten track' experiences, this place could have a substantial higher performance as visitor attraction. Although the remoteness of the place has an ultimate weight, this has to be attributed mainly to the absence of a resonating attraction and an engaging interpretative strategy for all publics, which, as we have seen, is not a priority for the local managing organisations. This is even more striking if we consider the different forms of engagement that this landscape provides, showcased by the offer of Terra Enllà.

S. Felip Neri square: a revendicated memory

Plaça Sant Felip Neri (St. Philip Neri Square) is a small square in the heart of the most popular tourist area of Barcelona, the Gothic Quarter (Fig. 2a). It can be accessed from two entranceways, providing transit for visitors going from the Cathedral nearby towards the Ramblas. It is contoured by a church built in 1752, a primary school, a convent now partly used as a student residence, and a building hosting until 2015 the *Museu del Calçat* (footwear museum), now unoccupied. The whole complex is property of the pontifical society Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. The only other building overlooking the square is the 'boutique hotel' Neri Relais & Châteaux. In the centre of the square there is a gothic styled fountain, offering resting space for visitors.

Figure 2a: map of the Gothic Quarter and location of S. Felip Neri; b: tourists at S. Felip Neri square; c: demonstration for the recuperation of historical memory at S. Felip Neri, 2013

The Gothic is visited and transited by the great majority of visitors to Barcelona, an estimated 33 million yearly, and, together with the modernist heritage, is one of the attractions most frequently recalled in visitor surveys (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2018). The neighbourhood itself represents a sort of ante-litteram 'thematization' of an urban area realised in the early 20th century, «emphasising on the stylistic characters that stood the best chances to make the area appealing to the already developed international visitor market» (Scarnato, 2013, p. 56; translation by authors; Ganau, 2008; Cócola Gant, 2014). That is, a space built expressively for the visitors' gaze, with an architectural and narrative specificity that constitutes a predictable mise-en-scène (Edensor, 2001). In this context, S. Felip Neri stands out as a 'quiet place', with two characteristics that give the impression of a quotidian space preserved from mass tourism: the presence of a school, with uniformed children playing around between 1-2 pm and 5-6 pm; and the absence of commercial outlets in the square itself (Fig. 2b).

Another form of staging tourism spaces, according to Edensor (2001), is their mediatisation; indeed, St. Felip Neri square has been chosen as a setting for the videoclip "My Immortal" by Evanescence (2000), for the motion pictures "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" (W. Allen, 2008) and "Perfume: The Story of a Murderer" (T. Tykwer, 2006) and for the TV-series "Cites" (P. Freixas, 2015). The image of the place precedes the place itself; as a young Catalan visiting Barcelona with her boyfriend told us, recalling all those media images: «you know, this square is pretty famous» [FN, Jan 25, 2017]. The same person added that they were aware of what happened there during the Civil War: in this example, the historical legacy of the square finds itself nested in its representational strategies.

The weight of history at St. Felip Neri is indeed overwhelming. On January 30, 1938, Barcelona was under the attack of the fascist Italian aviation for several hours. The bombs dropped at S. Felip Neri left 42 casualties, mostly children playing in the square during recess, and some of the people who were involved in subsequent rescuing operations; according to

historians, this may well be the first historical episode of using a trap-bomb against civilians. The facade of the church carries the marks of those bombs; however, they hardly tell any story: they need explanation and contextualisation. A Mexican visitor told us: “we can see those marks, but we cannot understand their relevance, their historical value” [FN, Feb 8, 2017]. An Argentinian tourist argued that it was surely not bombs that could have left those marks, until it was explained to him that the whole square was rebuilt after the bombing, and that only the church was left as it was. At that point, he definitely agreed with the need to explain what is so open to the sight but can be misunderstood:

> We go on discovering things. Now we will go to the castle [the Montjüic castle, used as an internment centre for Republican soldiers during and after the Civil War, now a ‘museum of peace’]. Fact is, I don’t like museums! I like to observe. This [S. Felip Neri square] would do it for me, you see? This is visual history, what one can see and make an idea of; you now clarified to me what happened, because I didn’t know it. [FN, Feb 8, 2017]

The value of this memoryscape thus stumbles in the lack of an unambiguous narrative that would permit to read the site properly. One among many tour guides that found themselves in the circumstance of justifying those marks, a New Zealander, commented: «I had former soldiers in tours who told me “there is no way that damage was caused just by bombs, they are definitely bullet marks”; others asked why these holes in the church had been preserved, if they could have been easily fixed; suggesting that they could have been ‘staged’ to tell a different story» [IN Feb 8, 2017]. In fact, in spite of historical and testimonial evidence, widespread rumour maintains that those marks were produced by gunfire, availing the theory that the responsible were anarchists, executing priests. A neighbourhood activist clarified: «they (the Francoists) didn't have any reason to cover them up [the marks], because they were in charge and no one would ever ask for explanations; rumours about anarchists do not need to find any complicated motive, it's like the ‘broken telephone’» [IN Feb 12, 2017]; that is, since people talked a lot about that issue, this confused rambling allows maintaining the most diverse versions of the events.

Another independent tour guide, of Argentinian nationality, is keen on introducing an everyday perceptive in his account of the legacy of S. Felip Neri. He talks about the historical events and context, not missing to mention how all this is relevant for the current political confrontation in Catalonia, and how the context of mass-tourist Barcelona generally works against memorialisation [FN, Oct 20, 2017]. His audience, which ranges from tourists with a special interest in Barcelona’s contemporary history to groups of academics and researchers, show great interest in this narrative and often express their concern about their ‘footprint’ in such landscape. In general, the number of organised and free tours that offer an historical insight on the events of 1938 is on the rise.

Recent initiatives have been taken to reclaim to S. Felip Neri square its memorial value, and one can read that as an organised effort of neighbourhood entities to revendicate a space which is increasingly taken over by tourist uses. A particular role has been played by AltraItalia, a grassroot association formed by Italian expats. Since 2010, Altraitalia has developed a line of work to unearth the role played by the Italian fascist army in the Civil

War, which eventually led to the first international demand for crimes against humanity related to the conflict (eschewing the 1977 Amnesty as it was filed against the Italian state). In 2011, AltraItalia organized a demonstration to claim the fascist responsibility of the bombing, which was not mentioned in the official commemorative plaque on the square wall (Fig. 2c).

In 2013, the municipal government put a second plaque on the floor of the square, now mentioning the Italian responsibility. Yet this plaque is only in Catalan and the older one, in a more visible place, was not removed. Another important subject at play in this square is the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. Recently, the Congregation has obtained permission to close the square to tourists during the school recess. Even if this doesn't stand for restoring historical memory, it provides an example of the community attempts to conquer back places that have become monopolized by mass tourism; increasingly, St. Felip Neri is being used to stage citizens' demonstrations against the different facets of overtourism.

The presence of residents in the square, though, is occasional. Mostly we ran into tourists who either pass by or stop in the square. Visitor practices in this space are attuned to its image: apart from staring at the buildings, and in a few cases stopping to read the plaque on the wall (no-one notices the one on the floor), taking pictures is the most popular activity. Cameras and cell phones mostly focus on the marks on the church; on a panorama of the square; on the fountain in the centre, which is used as a background for selfies. These performances eschew any active and dynamic engagement with historical memory.

Only once we had the chance to speak with a neighbour of the Gothic. He told us that he lived near the square; he was having a pause, smoking a cigarette, and was not bothered by our questions. He did not want to be recorded, but he told us about the many interventions of local governments, underling their inadequacy: «There's a plaque on the floor, yes, but it's full of mistakes, and you can barely see it! They were all happy to do this intervention … [laughs] Yet, there was no debate» [FN, Feb 8, 2017]. This quote airs a common feeling that historical memory has not been analysed enough, that it has been neglected, and still is.

6. Conclusions and final reflections

The two case studies proposed in this paper offer a demonstration of the ways in which historical memory is socially constructed, territorialised, and shared with visitors at memorial sites. In our study we have especially focused on the involvement of locals (or lack thereof) and at the position of tourists in such memoryscapes, with a view to the contribution these two categories of 'publics' can provide to a relational construction of memoryscapes. In this sense, we hope to contribute to the academic debate on historical memory and the value of popularising memorial sites through 'heritage from, as in Battilani et al. (2018) or Muzaini & Minca (2018).

In particular, we have highlighted which conditions could come across efforts to make such heritage resonating with tourist audiences – from the lack of social capital that hampers the involvement of local communities in the Ebro Battle memoryscape, to the 'pacified' and stereotyped mass-tourist landscape of which St. Felip Neri is a part. Both case studies point to shortcomings in the interpretation of the sites; nevertheless, they also feature remarkable

differences to this regard, which we situate both in their peculiar territorial context and in the capacity of local communities to steward such heritage, albeit for instrumental reasons.

The memorial sites at Corbera d'Ebre can hardly be considered visitor attractions for the broader public. The relatively low number of visitors that they attract mainly includes individuals or groups with a particular attachment to the site, out of personal, familiar or ideological ties, who have strong opinions about the events scripted in this landscape and their legacy. Yet they have limited opportunities to engage in debate and leave their mark on a palimpsest which reflects strongly an institutional, officialist narrative; besides, there is little space for co-construction of such narrative for community stakeholders, still divided and reluctant to come to ends with their past. The 'generalist' tourist audience of EMBE consists either of proximity visitors from Catalonia, or of the odd foreign vacationer who happens to drop by on the route to one of the other tourist activities offered in Terra Alta, and have a very limited capacity to decipher such landscape, if not else for lack of opportunities to engage with the local community. Their performances focus on its visible layer, although a strongly evocative one, as the *Poble Vell*. Only one local stakeholder manages to provide depth and a 'hands on' engagement with this memoryscape, through storytelling which is anchored in the everyday of a post-war rural landscape.

In contrast, S. Felip Neri square *is* a tourist place, traversed and photographed by hundreds of people daily in between visits to the most emblematic mass-tourist sites of Barcelona. Though knowledge about the 1938 bombing and its circumstances is by now widely available, few of these have a chance to learn the whole story at the site, form an opinion and engage with the past and the present of Barcelona. The nature of such square, a 'quiet place' of transit between many other mass-tourist icons, and the absence (or poor visibility) of an official narrative, relegated to a second place by the much more palatable and pacified promotion of the Gothic Quarter's architectural sights, play against its memorialisation. Yet the efforts of the local community (seconded by the current administration) to re-appropriate symbolically of this space against the disruptive force of mass-tourism, offer new opportunities for a deeper engagement of visitors with such landscape. Local stakeholders in Barcelona are eager to talk about this past, in some cases to re-shape their present and future of neighbours in the city, in others as a tool to relate to the current political stand-off. The illustration of AltraItalia's efforts to surface the responsibility of the Italian army in the bombing of Barcelona is a good case in point, featuring an expat community, situated in between residents, long-term migrants and strongly enmeshed with tourism mobilities, that takes an active role in this debate. Furthermore, as we pointed out, many visitors in Barcelona are aware of the political moment lived in Catalonia, and in a way or another take sides.

The compared analysis of these two cases thus invites to reflect on the potential value of opening up the semantization of war memorial sites to local stakeholders, rather than entrenching on official, historiographical narratives, which in the current political context of Catalonia may be seen as a limiting approach. Memoryscapes stand the best chances of resonating with the personal histories and pasts of other publics when their everyday dimension is evoked, and this, of necessity, requires the active engagement of local communities (as proposed by Battillani et al., 2018). Even the feeble community efforts

played out within an overtly institutionalised memoryscape such as in Corbera achieve a certain success in this sense, while the Barcelona case demonstrates that precisely the withdrawal of institutions from memorialisation in the context of a staged, pacified mass-tourist landscape has allowed the memoryscape of S. Felip Neri to engage a wider audience.

In both cases, there is much more work to do to establish historical memory as core attraction in their respective territorial settings, in view of attracting not necessarily 'more' tourists, but more *engaged* tourists. Developing the concept of 'heritage from below', local communities, of interest that have been disenfranchised by formal – nationalist – ways of remembering war pasts (e.g. women, migrants, Roma), can take an active role in this debate. The Corbera case illustrates that open dialogue with visitors could help in the way of reconciling the local community over their divisive past, while in Barcelona the current struggle for urban commons, seconded by the current administration, is an opportunity for more reflexive engagement of the visitors with the memory of war and the post-war. In this sense, a potentially more fruitful role of institutions should be that of enabling dialogue and the 'co-construction' of shared narratives among local stakeholders and communities of interest when this is hindered by problematic contexts and ideological entrenchments. Memorial sites, where contested memory is accessed and enacted by persons with very different backgrounds and expectations, offer a very good base for this challenge. Revisions in tourism governance, which empower local communities, open avenues of dialogue and inclusion in storytelling, and possibly support their efforts to achieve a better resonance of their narratives for international audiences – for instance through investments in ICT which combine the versatility of hypertext with collaborative 3.0 social media, to be taken up by community stakeholders and local tour companies – could be a way to mobilise such historical memory 'from below' towards building a sense of shared identity among tourists and European citizens.

In spite of the limitations of this study, which was based on a relatively small number of interviewees and limited techniques of engagement, we hope that it could inspire more systematic research on the resonance and responsiveness of contested memorial heritage sites for tourists, in the way of contributing to develop further the EU's goal of fostering a shared identity of European citizens.

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