

Places of memory. Is the concept applicable to the analysis of memorial struggles? The case of Uruguay and its recent past*

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Abstract

Between 1984 and 1992, Pierre Nora coined the concept of *place of memory* to designate those artifacts that where collective memory crystallizes and secretes itself. The concept, which was created to analyze the French memory, soon became involved in discussions about the advisability of applying it to other countries. Although the concept has been used in several empirical studies carried out in Latin America, its theoretical relevance in the context of the region's memorial struggles has hardly been discussed. This article probes the notion's possible bearing on Latin American circumstances, especially within the context of confrontation and

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memorial struggles, and in the history of the present time, by reflecting on the specific case of Uruguay and its recent past (pre-dictatorship and dictatorship).

Key words: dictatorship, history, memory, Uruguay

A society's public memory can be observed in several spheres: political actors or groups, public discussion and memory sites. We will focus on the latter, in order to both study the possible uses of the sites and to examine their probable limitations when applied to nations engrossed in memorial struggles. Bearing this in mind, we have chosen to observe the concept from the viewpoint of what has happened in Uruguay in connection with the recent past.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, over twenty years since this concept was first formulated, and after various books and articles have been written on the subject, it might seem incongruous to analyze its applicability to recent past events outside France. However, we shall see this is not so: although the concept has been applied to these issues, its relevance to such recent and violent pasts, particularly in Latin America, has not yet been discussed in depth. Therefore this article will first review the concept, its history and its application in France. Secondly, we shall debate its relevance in other countries and situations, then outline the convenience of using the model for the study of current history and, finally, address Uruguayan examples in order to analyze the relevance of the concept in memorial struggles over recent pasts.

The *Lieux de mémoire*: history and application

The concept was established in *Les Lieux de mémoire*, a seven-volume work directed by Pierre Nora and first published between 1984 and 1994. The definition, as it appears in the first article of Volume 1, refers to those places where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself”; the places where the exhausted capital of collective memory condenses and is expressed.¹ To be considered as such, these sites must be definable in the three senses of the word: material, symbolical and functional, all in different degrees but always present. On the other hand, what makes them a memory site is the interplay of memory and history, the interaction of both factors, which allows their reciprocal over-determination. From the very beginning, the *will to remember* must be present. Otherwise, the memory sites will be only historical sites, states Nora.

¹ Pierre Nora, «Entre Mémoire et Histoire», in idem (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, t. 1, La République, 2.^a ed., Paris, Gallimard, 2001, pp. 23-43.

In the next two volumes, the concept is extended to encompass “all significant units, of either material or ideal order, from which the will of men or the effect of time has created a symbolic element of the memorial patrimony of a community.”² Thus, what makes it a memory site is both its nature as a crossroads of different memory roads and its capacity to live on despite being constantly remodeled, retaken and revisited. A neglected memory site is, at most, the memory of a place.

In the 1984 text, Nora started out from commemoration, retreated towards memory, reflected on the relationship between memory and history, and set out to demonstrate that memory also has a history.³ Nora grasped at the memory tide, which had become evident in France and other countries, in order to analyze and pinpoint the consequences of how history is written, and how the task of the historian is carried out in France. He went from the term *memory* to *history*, and realized that French national history (on the Pierre Lavissee model) was really, deep down, a memory passed through the filter of history, an *authenticated* memory converted into history. It is thus an undertaking that, after demonstrating identity in the French school project (made evident in the relationship between history books and the national memory) seeks to deconstruct national history, with its representations and myths.

The *Lieux* are the work of a historian who gives us his interpretation of French history, focusing on the two main points he proposes to study: memory and the present. In this sense, in the opinion of François Hartog, the *Lieux* embody the most interesting proposal concerning the phenomenon of memory in France: “How, in certain key moments, the past (but which past and what part of the past?) had been taken up again in the present, in order to create a significant past”.⁴ For this reason Hartog considers that one of Nora’s objectives was to return to the present and attempt to understand it better. From the present to the present, contributing to the debate on memory, always civic-minded, never in a militant fashion...this is why he stated in 1984: “I had thought that the rapid disappearance of our national memory required an inventory

² Pierre Nora, «Comment écrire l’histoire de France», in P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, t. 2, Les France, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, pp. 12-32, p. 20. All translations, unless otherwise stated, are ours.

³ Though in a certain period the notions of memory and history may have been confused or challenged, in the sixties some historians announced a liberating and decisive divorce between the two terms. Thanks to this differentiation some historians decided to begin a history of memory: the analysis of representations of the past in certain periods or circles (particularly when these representations recurred regularly), insofar as they concerned a determined group, or had a basic audience within that group or outside it (Henry Rousso, «La mémoire n’est plus ce qu’elle était», in *Ecrire l’histoire du temps présent*, Paris, CNRS, 1993, pp. 105-113).

⁴ François Hartog, «Temps et histoire. Comment écrire l’histoire de France?», in *Annales-Histoire Sciences sociales*, N° 6, 1995, pp. 1219-1236, p. 1231.

of the places where it had effectively been played out”. On the basis of an opinion about the present, it was a matter of deciding on the meaning of *reconstruct*: “how to rewrite the history of France?”

The method chosen by Nora to approach memory, for which he is indebted to Maurice Halbwachs, emphasizes social and spatial aspects.⁵ We should however stress that it is memory as the object of history, and not of anthropology, sociology or philosophy, which entail quite different approaches to the topic: the realms of memory are a conception that can be used in order to write the history of memory. And even if there are many ways of studying its processes, historians have adopted mainly two: public discussions⁶ and the places of memory.

Difficulties in the application of the concept - I: Exportability

As soon as this work became known, a question arose: Was the concept, which appeared to be the diagnosis of a very specific case, applicable outside France? In fact, some authors consider that it is not. As we shall see throughout this article, its use not only has methodological implications, but also theoretical and empirical connotations: How does each country or community relate to its memory and, thus, to its present? The analysis of the realms of memory contributes to the knowledge of the connections between memory, forgetfulness, identity and the imaginary construction of a nation by means of its national memory. The truth is that the issue of whether the concept was fit to be exported or imported was crucial in initiating comparison and enabling a compared history in the sphere of memory.

The progress of its application in other parts of the world was facilitated by the memorial tidal wave that, between 1970 and 1980, asserted the rule, the effort and vigor of memory everywhere. Everywhere, piece by piece, societies have endeavored to safeguard their material or immaterial heritage. Nora considered that this *memorial yearning* had its utmost expansion in Eastern Europe and in other countries that have undergone a *traumatic* historical experience.

⁵ For a more complete theoretical development of the idea, and its relationship with French historiography, see Eugenia Allier Montano’s article, «Los Lieux de mémoire: una propuesta historiográfica para el análisis de la memoria», in *Historia y Grafía*, México, 2008.

⁶ For example, the work by Henry Rousso and Éric Conan (*Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*, París, Gallimard, 1996), as well as that of Benjamin Stora (*La gangrène et l’oubli. La mémoire de la guerre d’Algérie*, París, La Découverte, 1992). This option has also been followed in Latin America for several years. Some texts have been listed in the bibliography.

And from this starting point, he wondered how far the notion, devised within a French context, could become a more universal analytical tool.⁷

First reservation regarding the applicability of the concept outside France: the translation of the term. It is a neologism of Latin origin, from the ancient rhetorical tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, who recommended associating an idea to a site in order to secure order in discourse. Neither English nor German contain an equivalent. The translation into Spanish also posed various problems; the terms *entorno* (setting), *contexto* (context) and *lugar* (place) were proposed. Josefina Cuesta Bustillo, who had been Nora's student, suggested *lugares de la memoria* (places of memory), as it maintains the possibility of establishing and utilizing the concept in its historiographic sense, defined by Nora himself.⁸

Second reservation. The specificity of the concept is reinforced by the moment in which it appeared: the end of the seventies and beginning of the eighties. At this time it became evident that the immense capital of collective memory was falling into oblivion, to revive only by means of a scientific and reconstructive history. The moment was linked to certain events that were strictly French: 1) the resurgence of Gaullism; 2) the beginning of the economic crisis in 1974; 3) the beginning of the end of the revolutionary idea in 1975.

We believe that, as with every concept, the notion has to be given careful thought and adapted to other national realities. The sites of "younger" countries, like those in Latin America, would differ from those of Europeans. Almost certainly heroes and thinkers should be included (Artigas in Uruguay, Zapata or Hidalgo in Mexico, Bolivar in several South American countries), as well as commemorations (1492, which in the minds of some asserted the differences with Europe), words (Mexico, Peru, Argentina, just to mention the names with which they are designated), books (*Martín Fierro* in Argentina, *La Vorágine* in Colombia, for example). But given the divergences in history, as well as the identifying and constructive features of the nation concerned⁹, diverse themes, not found in other areas, will certainly arise¹⁰

⁷ Pierre Nora, «La aventura de Les lieux de mémoire», Josefina Cuesta Bustillo (ed.), *Memoria e Historia*, Revista Ayer, issue 32, 1998, pp. 17-34.

⁸ Josefina Cuesta Bustillo, «Memoria e historia. Un estado de la cuestión», en idem (ed.), *Memoria e Historia*, Revista Ayer 32 (1998), pp. 203-246.

⁹ *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991; Hugo Achugar (ed.), *La fundación por la palabra: Letra y nación en América Latina en el siglo XIX*, Montevideo, Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de la República, 1998.

¹⁰ In fact, Nora never carried out a typology of the sites: "Taken as a whole, these themes may be rearranged at will by each person, as in a game of Happy Families, according to different rules of parentage. Nora, «La aventura...», op. cit., p. 21.

Are not the questioning, objectives and interests of the undertaking observed also in other parts of the world? How about the characteristics and dilemmas of the present, the relationship between history and memory, past, present and future, identity and nation? Can they not be found beyond France? Are not the questions about the diagnosis of the present and the ways of writing history, the two central themes in the analysis and approach to a country, as we currently see in many other national situations? We believe that the answers to the above questions are affirmative and, therefore, the concept can be imported, even though it originated in questions relevant to French society, because its *plasticity*¹¹ makes it applicable to other national cases. In fact, the dissemination of the idea in the public domain took its creator and his collaborators quite by surprise: even before the work was completed, it had aroused a great deal of international interest.¹²

Difficulties in the application of the concept - II: historical periods

The question of the applicability of Nora's concept to different contexts is also pertinent in connection with the periods of time undergoing study: Is it only valid when applied to older history or also suitable for recent events? What happens with these sites when they are connected with a conflictive past, a burning past that divides a community and sets people against each other in the memory struggle?

As stated at the beginning of this article, the concept has already been applied to various problematical issues in the memory of the recent past, both in Latin America and in Spain.¹³ It would then seem of little use to discuss its relevance to really contemporary memory realms. This is not so, however, in the first place because many of these works do not debate the theoretical possibility of its use, but simply take it for granted. Secondly, because, as we shall see, quite a few authors have queried its validity in the history of the present time.

As for the studies carried out in Latin America, particularly in connection with the recent military dictatorships, we should mention the more than a dozen volumes published so far under the direction of Elizabeth Jelin, dedicated to commemorations, monuments, memorials and territorial landmarks, school curricula, archives and some artistic manifestations. They are all

¹¹ Nora, «La aventura...», op. cit..

¹² P. Den Boer, W. Frijhoff, *Lieux de mémoire et identités nationales*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1993; M. Isnenghi, *I Luoghi della memoria*, París-Roma, Laterza, 1996; M. y H. Möller, *Allemagne-France: Lieux de mémoire d'une histoire commune*, París, Albin Michel, 1995; Etienne François y Hagen Schulze, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 tomos, Múnich, C. H. Beck, 2001.

¹³ Ulrich Winter, *Lugares de memoria de la Guerra Civil y el franquismo. Representaciones literarias y visuales*, Madrid-Fráncfort, Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2006.

essential in order to study the history of *lieux de mémoire* related to the recent past in Latin America, but the relevance of the concept is barely analyzed within their covers. Hugo Achugar¹⁴ is one of the few authors that examines the concept in these volumes, though as he himself declares his main interest is to participate in the discussion taking place in connection with memory, the nation, deterritorialization, while at the same time seeking to discuss the post-dictatorship era in Uruguay and the problems of the politics of knowledge, such as standpoint, “the place from which one speaks”.¹⁵

The proposal of applying this concept to sites created by individuals, groups or factions, who are interested in remembering a part of recent history, had already been made in previous works.¹⁶ In this line of thought, one question is whether these sites refer to a memory settled on by historians, who *a posteriori*, and after a historical study, find that the sites have been imbued with the nation’s symbolic memory throughout their extensive history. Or if, on the other hand (or simultaneously), it refers to sites that have been conceived as memory artifacts because by this means a group, faction or political party wishes to remind citizens of a specific event in the recent history of the nation. It concerns two matters that are linked, but distinct from each other. We shall first examine who bestows the memorial intention on these places, and leave the question of historical time to be dealt with later.

In 1998 Nora said: “There would also be the great creative sites, undoubtedly the most interesting to seek, classify and *construct*”.¹⁷ The key may be in *construct*: Is it the historian who creates, constructs, shapes, seeks for and classifies the sites? It would be naïve to believe, well into the twenty-first century, that history is there waiting for a historian to write it down. Nowadays any history student knows that history is written by historians, but is there no role for its protagonists? Paul Ricœur suggests about the *lieux de mémoire*:

They receive their power from belonging to both realms: memory and history. On the one hand, “there must be a memorial intention” [quoting Nora]. But it does not say whether this memory is the lost memory of history-memory, whose loss was deplored at

¹⁴ Hugo Achugar, «El lugar de la memoria, a propósito de monumentos (Motivos y paréntesis)», en Elizabeth Jelin, Victoria Langland (eds.), *Monumentos, memoriales y marcas territoriales*, Madrid, Siglo XXI Editores, 2003, pp. 191-216.

¹⁵ We should mention another work by Achugar which is also related to these subjects: *La fundación por la palabra...*, op. cit..

¹⁶ Eugenia Allier, *Une histoire des luttes autour de la mémoire sur le passé récent en Uruguay, 1985-2003*, París, Escuela de Altos Estudios en Ciencias Sociales, 2004.

¹⁷ Nora, «La aventura...», op. cit., p. 31. Our italics.

first, or the memory that has sought shelter in the recondite corners of individual psychology and requirement of duty.¹⁸

Two quotes from Nora may clarify the situation. The first is from 1978 and suggests that the term refers to the places “to which a society [...] *voluntarily* consigns its memories, or discovers them as a necessary part of its personality”. Almost a decade later, he wrote: It is “any significant unit [...] that *human intention* or the passage of time” has converted into a symbolic element of memorial heritage. Taking these explanations as a starting point, we believe that the concept should include both the sites where the national memory crystallizes and those proposed, put up and chosen by residents, or the persons involved, to a greater or lesser degree, in the part of history they are attempting to rescue. So we acknowledge that, in some cases, the memory sites contain this memorial force in themselves, and do not need a certain group to grant it to them, or they sometimes receive it with the passage of time; others are created with the express intention of providing artifacts to aid memory and, with time, authenticate this intention.

Concerning the second issue, the questions would appear to be whether places of memory associated with recent, burning memories really exist, or whether we should only include sites that have persisted throughout different historical periods, leaving aside those that are in the process of being created. The memorials to the dead in France include those who perished in the Second World War. However, should the sites devoted to the dead of this war be considered separately?¹⁹ Perhaps the difference is that only after several (or many) years will it be known whether they survived the history of memory. For Nora it probably depends on the fact that these recent sites do not involve the length of time necessary for the history of a nation.

Though at the beginning Nora attempted to create a concept with a certain *plasticity*, as time passed he tried to avoid its dissolution, and for this reason continually redefined it.²⁰ It is precisely this plasticity that lays open the possibility that it might be a method more than a concept, as Cuesta Bustillo points out:

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *La memoria, la historia, el olvido*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 523.

¹⁹ Antoine Prost, «Les monuments aux morts», en P. Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, t. 1, La République, 2.^a ed. rev. y aum., París, Gallimard, 2001, pp. 199-223.

²⁰ This is precisely one of the reservations Achugar has about the concept: «The place of memory proposed by Pierre Nora, while it might seem effective, needs to be conceptualized more carefully, as the concept ends up by admitting any sphere as a place of memory. [...] To understand the place of memory as a geo-cultural or symbolic space is insufficient if the enunciation—in its pragmatic dimension—is not borne in mind and, particularly, the ideological horizon and the political horizon or political agenda from which this enunciation is constructed» («El lugar...», op. cit., p. 211)

The meticulous definition is an expression of rigor in the face of the tendency to enlarge on the meaning of the concept, which has brought about a degree of imprecision. Another of the virtues of the concept, in the opinion of Hartog, is its plasticity and operational capacity which, while favoring its acceptance, also contributed in a way to emptying it of meaning and allowing a continual extension of its boundaries and contours. The concept's very independence from the mould into which its creator cast it makes it run the risk of dilution, thus Nora's insistence on redefining it constantly. This plasticity and elasticity allows us to wonder whether it might be a method, rather than a concept with clearly defined outlines or a new way of approaching and analyzing memory.²¹

In Nora's view, the objective must be "to characterize a type of relationship with the past", to study the places that reveal the existence of an unconscious organization of the collective memory. It is not a matter of taking "a tour around the gardens of the past", but to analyze, take apart and demonstrate the way in which a nation relates to its past, and the places it transforms into symbols its bygone days.²² "What counts, we repeat, is the type of relationship with the past and the way in which the present utilizes and reconstructs it; the objects are no more than indicators or road signs."²³ With these words, Nora seems to suggest that the concept should not be applied to recently created sites, which seek to commemorate something that happened in the near past: a link must be found, connecting the different national memory sites, and allowing us to understand both the identity and the memory of a nation. If reference is made exclusively to a certain period of history, it would seem the objective is not achieved.

Nora himself discussed this matter with Cuesta Bustillo, who carried out a major work on the memory sites related to the Franco regime in Spain:

From this seminar [Pierre Nora's at EHESS] sprung the conviction that the *lieux* from the Franco regime that we had analyzed, applying his methodology, did not fulfill all the conditions propounded in the definition of the concept: among others, their continued existence beyond the generation that created them, and this is the reason why in later publications we employed the term *deposits of memory* to differentiate them from

²¹ Cuesta Bustillo, «Memoria...», op. cit., p. 218.

²² It is worth remembering that Nora's work is made up by more than 130 texts that deal with an infinity of symbolic places of memory in France, from the Gallic rooster and notions such as right, left, Hexagon, liberty, equality and fraternity to the national museums (the Louvre and Versailles), by way of coffee, wine, phrases like «to die for the fatherland» and Marcel Proust's famous novel.

²³ Nora, «La aventura...», op. cit., p. 33.

the concept of *places of memory* (*lieux de mémoire*), which had been carefully coined and defined.²⁴

It would seem then that the discussion will always give rise to the old debate as to whether it is possible to write the history of the present. This debate commenced towards the end of the sixties in some European countries, and as time passed it was answered affirmatively: the history of the present is as valid as any other. To believe that the concept of memory site cannot be applied to the recent past is like thinking that you cannot write the history of the present time or that the present is not important when you compile a history of memory, when the *lieux* are just that, an example of *presentism*.²⁵ The notion is valid for the present, but like all history referred to this time, entails its own challenges and difficulties. One of them is knowing what part of the history we are undergoing and writing will finally become part of the present when *this present we are now inhabiting* is already a vague, distant reality. History is not futurology, so it is in the hands of future generations to determine which memory sites of what is now our present will remain significant in a still distant future.

Memorial struggles for the recent past in Uruguay

The study of the Uruguayan case will give us the opportunity of putting the concept into practice, not only from the theoretical point of view, but also with an empirical perspective, with any necessary adjustments necessary for a history of the present time.

a. When do memory sites emerge?

Nora pointed out that it was fundamental for the memory to have disappeared before dedicating a site to it, as it involves an object in which the past is taken up again in the present. In the 1990s, he suggested that places of memory are “like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded”. There they are, but the only active relationship that can be engaged in with them is the one proposed in *Lieux*: a second degree relationship, produced by the reactivation of whatever history they hold. In the view of this historian, memory is only discussed when it no longer exists, when it has vanished: “If we were still inhabiting our memory, there would be no need to consecrate places to it. There would be no places, because no memories would have been swept away by history.”²⁶ It is for this reason that “the places of

²⁴ Cuesta Bustillo, «Memoria...», op. cit., p. 223.

²⁵ François Hartog, Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps, Paris, Le Seuil, 2003.

²⁶ Nora, «Entre Mémoire...», op. cit., p. 24.

memory are fundamentally remains, the extreme form in which a commemorative conscience endures in a history that summons it, because it is unknown.²⁷

If for Nora the memory sites only appear when the memory is already lost, in the case of the history of the present time we would have to reason things out differently. Memory cannot be lost in advance, though perhaps it is still being shaped. It may be that in Uruguay and other countries of the region, the places of memory linked with the military regimes have been put up with the intention of *creating* and transmitting a memory, and not recreating one that has not yet been developed in society.

One example of this is the song *Angelitos*, written by José Carbajal, *El Sabalero*, during his exile, and dedicated to the children who went missing during the dictatorship.²⁸ Towards the end, the lyrics say:

Señor Presidente, oiga esta canción / con todas sus tropas y sus cortesanos / no nos
callaremos hasta que sepamos / dónde está Mariana, dónde está Simón. // Y les
prometemos dormirlos cantando / [...] / hasta que regresen bien pronto y sanitos / a estar
con nosotros y vivir jugando. // Fernando, Andrea, Mariana, Amaral, Anatole, Victoria, la
hija de Aída y Simón.

This can be approximately translated as:

Mr. President, hear this song / with all your troops and your courtiers / we shall not
hush until we hear / where is Mariana, where is Simón? / and we shall sing them cradle
songs/ [...] / until they get home safe and sound / to be with us and play around. //
Fernando, Andrea, Mariana, Amaral, Anatole, Victoria the daughter of Aída and Simón.

Once the military-civilian regime ended, *Angelitos* became one of the emblematic songs for the Uruguayan struggle to attain justice. In April 2002, When Sara Méndez was at long last reunited with her son Simón Riquelo (the last young missing Uruguayan to be located), after almost twenty-six years of separation, *El Sabalero* announced that he would never sing *Angelitos* again, out of respect for the families of the recovered sons and daughters. In the view

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 28.

²⁸ According to the Asociación de Familiares (A todos ellos, Montevideo, edited by Madres y Familiares de Uruguayos Detenidos Desaparecidos, 2004), fourteen of the young people who had disappeared now know their biological identity. Among the other missing, two were older than fourteen, so it is highly unlikely that they would have remained alive after their disappearance, and four are not resolved because it is not known whether they were born. This would mean that all the missing children in Uruguay have been localized.

of its author, it was “a song that no longer needed to be sung”.²⁹ If Carbajal’s objective was to demand that the missing children be located, once they had all been found the song, sung live, lost its meaning, because its plea had been answered. Thus, on 17 April 2002, *Angelitos was sung by its author for the last time, because everyone now knew “where is Mariana, where is Simón”*.

The song was not so much directed at remembering events that affected the social structure of the country as a whole, as to call for the reparation of some of the consequences of human rights violations: the recovery of the missing children. A place of memory or a place of denunciation? Both: denunciation was present, but so was the need of creating a conscience about a past that did not exist, not because it had been forgotten but because it was unknown. To the *therapeutic memory*,³⁰ as used by Nora Rabotnikof, was added a *denunciatory memory*. After all, denunciation is closely linked to the reestablishment of justice, as it normally proceeds from a rhetoric that seeks to persuade and mobilize more people, with the intention of getting them to join the protests, in such a way that the violence subsequent to disclosure is in scale with the disclosed injustice.³¹

If Nora applied himself to the study of the French national memory in its whole, announcing its accelerated disappearance, we could reason that this is also true of more contemporary memories, related to pasts that are still bitterly controversial. Nora points out that one of the main differences between memory and history is that the former is alive, with living groups and in permanent evolution, open to the dialectics of remembrance and amnesia, whereas he assures that once there is a trail, distance, mediation, it is no longer in the realm of memory, but in the sphere of history.³² But then, which would be the place of the history of the present, when it devotes its efforts to studying living generations that have witnessed a historical event? The question is whether places of memory emerge because of the need to consecrate a site to its memory because it is disappearing, or if they are born from the effervescence of the memory itself.

Regarding the first question, we should mention that although Nora himself has participated in debates about the relevance of the history of the present,³³ his theory has not

²⁹ La República V (800), 18 de abril de 2002, p. 32.

³⁰ «Memoria y política: compromiso ético y pluralismo de interpretaciones», en Revista Uruguaya de Ciencia Política, núm. 9, 1996, pp. 143-150.

³¹ Luc Boltansky, «La dénonciation», Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales, núm. 51, 1984, pp. 3-40.

³² Nora, «Entre Mémoire...», op. cit..

³³ For example, Pierre Nora, «De l’histoire contemporaine au présent historique», en Ecrire l’histoire du temps présent, París, CNRS, 1993, pp. 43-47.

dealt with it specifically, and for this reason his comparative analysis of history and memory appears contradictory for a history of the present. However, this does not impinge on his personal interest, exclusively referred to memory. Therefore it should be categorized as a contradiction, an error that does not allow for the existence of this type of history, and subjected to further study, as it exceeds the limits of this one. As for the other two questions, we should mention that certain Uruguayan memory sites seem to confirm the hypothesis that they are born from the very effervescence of memory, and not from its disappearance.

Moving onto another example, a plaque that seeks to vindicate the memory of the Uruguayan Armed Forces, revealing an *institutional memory* that evidently does not expect to be externalized or to receive the acknowledgement of the rest of society, because it has not been placed on the outside of any establishment, in a public space, but inside a military building. It is a plaque in the *Centro Militar* building, and it reads as follows: “Entry is forbidden to any person who has been linked to seditious activities”. It was put up following a resolution taken by the *Asamblea General del Centro Militar* on 30 September 1987.

It is by no means a surprise that this plaque should have seen the light in 1987, a moment of transition in which the awareness of a rupture with the past, for the military, was mingled with the sense of a heartrending memory. And it was that heartbreak precisely that had the capacity to awaken just enough memory, the recollection of a past that was being left behind, but existed simultaneously in the present and in the visions of the past. Here we can see how the sense of continuity appears to make the places of memory residual: they exist because there is no longer an “environment of memory”.³⁴

Another reason for the importance of this plaque is that it represents the reverse side of the other, most frequently found, memory in Uruguayan sites related to the recent past. Generally in the commemorative sites approved by the national or municipal governments the message is critical of the *coup d'état* and the deeds of the armed forces during the dictatorship, but the reading of the past in the *Centro Militar* is diametrically opposed: not only does it extol the heroism of those who died “defending the fatherland” during the dictatorship, but it also, as part of vindicating their courage, rejects all those who were linked to “sedition”, as they were the ones against whom the military had to fight because “the fatherland was in danger”.

So in this way we have two *Lieux de Mémoire* with opposing discourses about the past. One vindicates the “war” carried out against “sedition”, recalling a memory that seems to be fading from the public arena with the passage of time, whereas the other reviles the “state terrorism” wielded by the military and police during the dictatorship, and becomes an artifact of memory that “loses meaning” when the demands on that past have been met with. How then can we comprehend the memory site? Is it an artifact that provides anchorage for disappearing

³⁴ Ibidem.

memory, that seeks to create a memory that does not yet exist, or that only makes sense insofar as it provides support for an exigency of the present concerning the past? Or is the memory consecrated precisely because it is lived in? Each case seems to hold a different meaning in its connections with the recollection of the past, and for this reason must be analyzed in a specific way.

b. *Amnesia*

Now then, if some places of memory are expected to stop existing once their mission is carried out, thus becoming a part of forgetfulness, we must also mention the existence of what are simply *places of amnesia*. Curiously, this definition was neglected by Nora, a fact criticized by some historians, who adduced that if the places consecrated to memory are important, those that crystallize the forgetfulness of an event or a period in history are no less significant.³⁵

In Uruguay there are several buildings and premises that functioned as detention centers during the military regime, and can be considered places of amnesia. However, one stands out in view of its current use: the Punta Carretas Shopping Center, where forgetfulness reaches its paroxysm. The prison building was used during the dictatorship to house hundreds of political prisoners, and was vacated shortly after the first government of Julio María Sanguinetti (1985-1990) came into power. The ordinary prisoners were moved to other establishments. The building was left unused and empty for years. In July 1991 it was sold to Alian S.A., a private consortium, for almost seven million dollars. The group's plan was to convert the old prison into a shopping mall, although they avoided using this term and emphasized the construction of spaces for cultural activities and entertainment, the creation of a space for culture and leisurely strolls. The costly project started off under this guise, but it was really one more altar to consumerism.

In July 1994, what had been Punta Carretas penitentiary, where several hundred political prisoners had lived and been tortured, reopened as a shopping centre. The metaphor is unequivocal: one must forget, and turn the places of memory into places of forgetfulness and consumerism. The new Punta Carretas Shopping Center conserves the original façade of the

³⁵ Lucette Valensi, «Histoire nationale, histoire monumentale. Les lieux de mémoire (note critique)», en *Annales-Histoire Sciences sociales*, núm. 6, 1995, pp. 1271-1277.

And while it might be true that forgetfulness constitutes one of the facets of memory, as pointed out by several scholars who have analyzed the subject (Maurice Halbwachs, *La memoria colectiva*, Zaragoza, Ediciones Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2005; Marc Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli*, París, Manuels Payot, 1998) it is also true that the politics of memory can be differentiated clearly from the politics of forgetfulness by means of actions, places of memory and debates in the public space (Ricoeur, *La memoria...*, op. cit.).

prison; only the inside has changed: the 384 prison cells have become some 170 shops. In June 2003, some posters on the glassed sides of a walkway read: “*Mientras más recorres el shopping, más descubrirás Uruguay*” (The more you walk the shopping centre, the better you’ll know Uruguay). The message seems to refer to an irrefutable reality, though it is doubtful that the mall’s management meant it the way we do: anyone who strolls through Punta Carretas will inevitably be walking on the oblivion of the recent past in Uruguay. It is a space where memory has been partially torn down: “a stage where history has been erased, demolished or reconstructed efficiently, or at least in a manner favorable to the dominant discourse”.³⁶

The truth of the matter is that the symbolic value of the sites is fundamental for the transmission of memory, as this cannot happen in a void: as well as a social framework,³⁷ the process needs points of reference that will allow for the recollection of the past. In the Punta Carretas mall, is any part of the past conserved in this consumer-oriented present? The views of the ex-inmates who spent a part of their lives in the prison do not always coincide. For example one of them remarked that when he went into the shopping centre he could still perceive the smell of the old prison. Another, who was first a political activist, subsequently imprisoned, later became an exile, and was now a taxi driver, tried painstakingly to locate his old cell among the marquees. What has more value, the original structure or whatever modifications successive presents have bestowed on a building? Or does the value of a building, after its original function has expired, depend on its refunctionalization, its resemantization, which are in consonance with the new demands that the moment and the social milieu have laid on it? If the answer to this question is affirmative, then in Uruguay the population is in debt to its recent past as far as military detention centers and prisons are concerned.

Hartog suggests that if the *Lieux* are a symptom of today, they are so too in the conception of memory taking place there. In the opinion of this historian, the same undertaking, carried out twenty-five years previously, would have found the unconscious (Freudian slips, memory gaps, amnesia, displacement, and so on) playing an important role. In the *Lieux*, the researcher does not propose to unmask the unthinkable in a site, but to reconstruct what made it thinkable. This is the difficulty of discussing the *non-places* or the *bad* places of history or the national memory.³⁸ It is thus necessary to include forgetfulness and amnesia in the concept, not only in the case of the recent pasts, but also for those that already appear to be dominant or agreed on by a society, as it is precisely here that most omissions may take place.

³⁶ Hugo Achugar, «Territorios y memorias versus lógica del mercado (a propósito de cartografías y shopping malls)», en <<http://acd.ufrj.br/pacc/artelatina/hugo.html>>. I This article contains an interesting review of the debates that took place concerning the construction of the shopping mall.

³⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *La memoria...*, op. cit..

³⁸ Hartog, «Temps...», op. cit..

c. *The crystallization of a nation's shared vision?*

Therefore, how can we define sites of memory? Are they material, symbolic or functional artifacts that crystallize the shared vision of a nation's past? Some authors believe this is so. However, we consider that there are some examples that contradict this statement, particularly when it comes to recent, violent pasts that have not yet been resolved by different sectors of a society, and when the community holds dissimilar memories of that past.

On one hand, putting up plaques, as well as designating streets and squares with names related to Uruguay's recent past, is linked to one version of history, the one that highlights the violation of human rights and the *state terrorism* during the military-civilian regime. On the other hand, another version reviles the violent acts of the MLN-T or *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros* (National Liberation Movement – Tupamaros).

One of the emblematic violent events in Uruguay, taking place in an urban space, was the death of four soldiers on 18 May 1972. This historical event has two different and contradictory versions. The first, put out by the armed forces and backed by certain sectors of the traditional parties, asserts that the soldiers were on guard outside the residence of the commander-in-chief (drinking *mate*, the ever-present Uruguayan infusion, according to this version) when they were attacked and murdered by the MLN-T. The other version, given by the Tupamaros, assures that the four soldiers died as result of wounds inflicted in combat with members of the organization. Neither version denies that they died at the hands of the Tupamaros; the difference is in the how the deaths are described: “death in combat” or “cold-blooded murder”.

In 2003 the town councilors of Montevideo approved the placing of a commemorative plaque in memory of the four soldiers, on the entrance door of what was then the home of the commander-in-chief of the army, Florencio Gravina. The text on the plaque, arduously negotiated, translates as: “In this place, on 18 July 1972, the soldiers Saúl Correa Díaz, Osiris Núñez Silva, Gaudencio Núñez Santiago and Ramón Jesús Ferreira Escobal died as a result of guerrilla action while carrying out their duty of defending the Institutions”

The plaques, the names of streets, are *political dilemmas*. Therefore, they are always specifically linked to the history of political struggle. A plaque, the name of a street, also denote a vision of the nation's past, and are a way of writing or rewriting history on public thoroughfares³⁹ This is why the crystallization of a specific memory in a commemorative inscription can unleash a dispute about the past and the different versions of that past. And this is exactly what happened on 14 May 2004, when the plaque dedicated to the four soldiers was unveiled, something that has not happened with other initiatives connected with the dictatorship

³⁹ Mariana Sauber, «Traces fragiles. Les plaques commémoratives dans les rues de Paris», en *Annales*, núm 3, 1993, pp. 715-728.

and the period just before it. On that day, Tupamaro leader Jorge Zabalza disputed the resolution, asserting that the soldiers had not been killed premeditatedly by the members of MLN-T. He avowed that the death of the soldiers had been “an act of war, a battle, and not the murder of defenseless victims”, and that for this reason he found it “incomprehensible that the Left should contribute to such a tremendous ideological falsification of the truth”, generating a memory in which “the Armed Forces were defending the institutions, and we Tupamaros were attacking the nation”, something which to his mind was not in keeping with the historical reality of the seventies.⁴⁰

The decision to put up this plaque was taken unanimously by the *Junta Departamental de Montevideo*, the city’s legislative body. This stance could be interpreted as a concession from the *Frente Amplio* city government either towards the *Partido Colorado*, one of the two traditional Uruguayan parties, or towards the armed forces. There is no doubt that this urban space represented only one interpretation of history. The inscribed words were absolutely clear in this sense: the soldiers died “as a result of guerrilla action [...] while they were carrying out their duty of defending the Institutions”. The action became a way of admitting that violence had also originated in the guerrilla groups. In this manner the plaque crystallized the view of the Colorado party, and above all the armed forces.

Many of the incidents that took place in Uruguay in the recent past, particularly those related with violence, are a matter of dispute. Sundry versions about what happened co-exist in the public arena, among political and social actors, as well as in the places of memory, which transmit to society an interpretation of the past. The new generations, the young people who have not known the facts in any other way, will take these views and make them theirs (though it may also happen that they will conceive their own versions). Thus it is understandable that certain names should call for debate, because the various political players are not willing to see their vision of history erased from the public and urban spaces in the country. In fact, this multiplicity of versions, beyond just leading us to question the status of truth in memory, demonstrates the desire of the different social actors to appropriate the past. In this case, the intention appears to express the need of holding others (the Tupamaros) responsible for the violence.

It becomes evident that, in dealing with controversial historical events and processes, the *Lieux* do not always crystallize the vision shared by society of their historic past. Moreover, they become spaces that give expression to the memory struggles that trouble a whole community: The memorial plaque dedicated to the four soldiers has developed into a materialization of the battleground (the public memory) observable in the public arena. And this is because a memorial, a plaque, will always be a representation.

⁴⁰ Jorge Zabalza, en Brecha, 4 de junio de 2004.

d. The history of places of memory

Precisely because the places of memory are not just artifacts where memories and the forgetfulness of the past are deposited, devices immobilized in time, and even when their *raison d'être* is, in a way, to halt the advance of time, to inhibit the task of oblivion, this does not stop them from having a history. According to Nora, they only survive thanks to their capacity for metamorphosis, in the incessant changes in their significance and the unpredictable profusion of their ramifications. The places are thus diverse, hybrid and mutant, intimately charged with life and death, time and eternity.⁴¹ In other words, they are linked to processes: genesis, development, sometimes an end. This becomes far more evident in the case of commemorations.

National days and anniversaries are instances in which a nation's memories are produced and activated; they are the public occasions in which social and political figures can activate the diverse meanings that are ascribed to the past.⁴² "Commemorations set their own rhythms and terms, redefining the calendar of public life, which gives way and makes use of them, attempting to conciliate memory, pedagogy and political messages for the short term."⁴³ In fact, far from being a French phenomenon, commemoration has flourished everywhere. Once more we see that the idea is applied to French issues, but also observed in other parts of the world.

In Uruguay there are quite a few symbolic dates relating to the recent past, most of them stained by the memory of bloodshed. And though many of them have had the merits to become commemorations, there are two that stand out for their rallying power and the way they have been transformed with time into points of reference for contrasting memories of the past: May 20⁴⁴ and April 14.⁴⁵ The latter is a very good example of the importance of the history of memory sites. It is important to point out that Aldo Marchesi has already analyzed this

⁴¹ Nora, «Entre Mémoire...», op. cit..

⁴² Elizabeth Jelin, «Los sentidos de la conmemoración», en idem (ed.), *Las conmemoraciones: Las disputas en las fechas «in-felices»*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2002, pp. 245-251.

⁴³ Hartog, «Temps...», o. cit., p. 1227.

⁴⁴ Observed as from 1996, commemorating the assassination of legislators Zelmar Michelini and Héctor Gutiérrez Ruiz, ex tupamaro William Withelaw Blanco y his partner Rosario Barredo, perpetrated in Buenos Aires in 1976.

⁴⁵ Although both of these dates refer to acts of bloodshed, 27 June 1973 and 30 November 1980 can be studied from the same perspective, with very interesting results. Due to space limitations, we have had to omit this analysis. The subject is dealt with in Allier, *Une histoire des luttes autour de la mémoire...*, op. cit..

commemoration, within the books edited by Elizabeth Jelin.⁴⁶ In this sense, we take up his analysis though with a few discrepancies, and the addition of the last years of their history.

For many years this date was the only official commemoration in the country. This is because 14 April 1972 marked, for Uruguayan society, a paroxysm of the violence of the seventies. On that morning the MLN killed four people, accused of belonging to the death squadron. The armed forces reacted immediately: eight Tupamaros dead. The commemoration of this event was instituted in the country right after it happened. When events are chosen to be commemorated from the moment they take place, it is in this present that the sense of the action in itself is projected into the future,⁴⁷ as we shall see in this case. Accordingly, on 14 April 1972, the Colorado party transformed the burial of the four people killed by the MLN into a political operation: in this way grouping the armed forces and the traditional parties around the event and identifying them as defenders of democracy and of the nation, facing up to the threat of *subversion*.

According to Marchesi's analysis, this commemoration can be divided into three stages. The first goes from 1973 to 1975. During this period, May 14 was commemorated only by the military: most of the members of the traditional parties, the *Partido Colorado* and the *Partido Nacional*, did not participate as they disagreed with the coup d'état. The sense of the celebration was much the same as in 1972.

In the official tribute to the soldiers who fell defending the democratic institutions a votive torch is lit, the national anthem is sung and there is a military salute. This demonstrates the symbolic, material and functional characterization that are intrinsic to commemorations as *Lieux de mémoire*. The symbolic aspect is provided by the meaning incorporated into the date, and this functions, every so often, as a focused summons to memory, and is periodically materialized by the gestures, the actors, the rites and demonstrations.

The second phase begins in August 1975, when the Executive officially announced (decree 606/975) the commemoration of the "*Día de los caídos en la lucha contra la sedición*" (Day of the Fallen in the Battle against Sedition) in remembrance of the 'painful events that took place on 14 April 1972'.⁴⁸ This second stage continued until 1984. The meaning of the

⁴⁶ Aldo Marchesi, «¿"Guerra" o "Terrorismo de Estado"? Recuerdos enfrentados sobre el pasado reciente», en E. Jelin (ed.), *Las conmemoraciones: Las disputas en las fechas «in-felices»*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI, 2002, p. 101-147.

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora, «L'ère de la commémoration», en P. Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, t. 3, Les France, 2.^a ed. rev. y aum., París, Gallimard, 1998, pp. 4687-4718.

⁴⁸ It is important to point out that this homage to the *Mártires caídos en la lucha antsubversiva* was a milestone in the construction of the armed forces' historical and symbolic references. Isabella Cosse,

commemoration did not vary from the previous period: a tribute to those who had died to preserve the nation from *subversion*. However, the ceremony was not limited to military presence alone, they had ample rallying power and also counted on the compulsory attendance of students.

The third stage began in 1985, when President Julio María Sanguinetti changed the designation: from ‘fallen in the battle against *sedition*’, the commemoration became “Day of the Fallen in the Battle for the Defense of the Democratic Institutions” (decree 127/985). Some of the military reacted to the change by saying that they had defended the nation, rather than democracy. However, this renaming allowed for the reintegration of some sectors of the *Colorado* and *Nacional* parties, although the civilian sectors continued to be reluctant to participate in a commemoration that did not appear to include them. Despite the change in name, the meaning of the commemoration indicated the construction of an account from the past that denoted a continuation of the military observance during the last few years, but at the same time adapted to the country’s new democratic circumstances; that is to say, in a setting of *unity* and *national reconciliation*.⁴⁹

Finally, a crucial moment in the history of this commemoration came about in 2005. In March that year, the Minister of Defense of the new Frente Amplio government, Ms. Azucena Berruti, announced that the decree that endorsed the official commemoration of the *Día de los Caídos* would be put on hold in order to study another formula that would be effective in “improving the bond between Uruguayans”.⁵⁰ And indeed, on 14 April 2005, for the first time since the dictatorship instituted it, the *Día de los Caídos* was not officially observed. The police and armed forces honored their dead nevertheless, in ceremonies carried out in military units and clubs. The military, together with a few Nacional and Colorado politicians, vindicated the actions of the armed forces in the seventies, during the period of the “internal war”, and questioned the decision taken by Tabaré Vasquez’s government to suspend the commemoration. This divergence shows that the battle for the memory of the recent past is not finished with yet.

The relevance of commemorating April 14 is to be found in each of the moments, periods and circumstances in which it can be studied: in its origins, its different processes and its possible end. It is an example that specifically allows us to observe how the history of a commemoration develops in its role as a memory site. When Nora asks himself what it is that defines a place of memory, whether it is the initial intention or the never-ending return of memory cycles, his conclusion is: both, because “all places of memory are objects in an abyss”.

Vania Markarian, 1975: *Año de la Orientalidad: identidad, memoria e historia en una dictadura*, Montevideo, Trilce, 1996.

⁴⁹ Marchesi, «¿”Guerra”...?», op. cit..

⁵⁰ *La República V* (1774), 15 de marzo de 2005, p. 4.

And he continues: “It is this very principle of double belonging that allows, in the indefinite multiplicity of sites, a hierarchy, a delimitation of fields, a gamut of hues”.⁵¹

If the origins of the April 14 commemoration can be traced back to the day after the commemorated event, and can be envisaged in the different stages, its apparent end is also important in the context of the memorial struggle over Uruguay’s recent past. This commemoration was one of the few memory sites representing the viewpoint of the military in the face of Uruguayan society. This version, consecrating *the praise of the past* in the homage to the fallen on 14 April 1972, also expresses this distinct interpretation of the victims of the “war” suffered by the country: those who died as a result of “subversive terrorism”.

Finally, when significant public moments –like commemorations—are observed, it becomes evident that not all social sectors share the same memories,⁵² that the political uses of the past are directly related to the events that took place but also to the present and future sought after by society. So far the two major views of the past, embodied in the commemorations of April 14 and May 20, coexist with neither of them becoming hegemonic. However, the viewpoint that is beginning to dominate in the public space, and also in many memory sites, is the one condemning the civilian-military regime and “state terrorism”.⁵³ And this is what seems to confirm the possible end of this commemoration: a new national government (left-wing and many of whose members suffered through state repression themselves) decreed the end of this official commemoration of the past. This is why it is quite possible that the version of “state terrorism” will become dominant during the government of President Tabaré Vázquez.

Usefulness of the concept in the struggles for the appropriation of the past

If, as asserted by Nora and so many other scholars of memory, this has received far greater recognition over the last few years than it ever had before, this is partly due to the processes of globalization and the feeling of a lack of strong identities, as well as the sense that nothing should be lost, and that every memory is important for the future: individuals and societies have undertaken the task of recording everything they do not wish to be forgotten.⁵⁴ The debate about national memories will then be closely connected to questioning the nation in

⁵¹ Nora, «Entre Mémoire...», op. cit., p. 39.

⁵² Jelin, «Los sentidos...», op. cit..

⁵³ In an earlier study we analyzed many places of memory in the urban space that demonstrate this tendency, such as the names of streets and squares, buildings linked to the recent past, and commemorations. The interested reader may find the information here: Allier, *Une histoire des luttes autour de la mémoire...*, op. cit..

⁵⁴ Achugar, «El lugar...», op. cit..

itself, and the national identity. It would imply a negotiation at a societal level of what the country wishes to be as a nation: a negotiation to find a national consensus on forgetfulness or memory. This is why nowadays the analysis of the discourse in the places of memory is fundamental, in order to understand the links between memory, forgetfulness, identity and the imaginary construction of the nation, because ultimately, in the writing of all history, an image of the nation is being restructured. Sign

It is also fundamental, after an exceedingly violent past, to understand the disclosures and proposals of the memory and amnesia sites raised on the foundation of this past. Because, ultimately, “the present of the past is a mark of the century’s end”.⁵⁵ If we live today in a structure of historicity determined by the present (the present dominates both the past and the future in the social relationships with time),⁵⁶ three words resume the new changes: memory, heritage and commemoration. And, ultimately, these three terms point towards another, which represents the focus: identity. And this is the starting point of Nora’s diagnosis, and the reason why it is so important to analyze the implications of the places of memory related to a specific past, because if presentism goes hand in hand with questions about the nation and the crisis of national identities, it should be pointed out that practically all nations are faced by the need to probe into these matters.

We should point out that the case dealt with in this work is not a national history (though an identity crisis is certainly implicit) but a specific historical period marked by conflicts, violence, and the subsequent wounds, and that, for this very reason, it retains this confrontational character in the present. It does not involve only the present of the past, but a memorial struggle, battles for the appropriation of the recent past waged from the present.

As the *Lieux de mémoire* are also a writing of history, they participate in the memorial struggles between different groups or social actors who are attempting to appropriate a doubtful past. The concept reviewed here can certainly be applied to the analysis of memorial struggles: the memory sites originated in these struggles, through their meaning and in the discussions they generate, wage their own battles for the appropriation of the past and the country’s definition of its identity.⁵⁷ However, what must be made clear is that, in the case of recent

⁵⁵ Achugar, «El presente del pasado, o balance y liquidación de la nación», en *Papeles de Montevideo. Literatura y cultura*, núm. 2, 1997, pp. 110-124, p. 120.

⁵⁶ Hartog, *Régimes...*, op. cit.. Véase también Nora Rabotnikof, «¿Una memoria presentista? (Acerca de una tesis de François Hartog)», en Maya Aguiluz y Gilda Waldman (coords.), *Memorias (in) cónicas: contiendas en la historia*, México, CEIICH-UNAM, 2007, pp. 61-83.

⁵⁷ This has been quite evident in Uruguay, where the return to democracy in 1985 spurred the beginning of vigorous public and academic discussion about the Uruguayan identity, about the national myths that, until the dictatorship, involved ideas like peaceful coexistence, national consensus, the

pasts, particularly when they were violent, the places of memory may function in a manner different from the ones that link to more distant pasts.

According to current ideas, we consider that the concept is applicable to sites of the present, in other words, to places of memory created a short time ago and related to the recent past. It is a history of the present time, the history of a community's living memory, a notion which has been accepted for some time now by many historians in various countries of the world. However, as any other history of the present it entails a number of difficulties.

For this article we have chosen just a few of the points and features of memory sites, in order to address them by means of four examples that are linked to Uruguay's recent past. Touching on all the attributes of these sites would have been impossible in a text of this length. In conclusion, we can say that, in the first place, these artifacts are not always born from the sense that memory is disappearing: they may in fact appear at the moment of its greatest turmoil. Secondly, it is not only memory that crystallizes in these places, so does forgetfulness: to the places of memory we should add the places of amnesia. Thirdly, while the initial intention of these places is to remember, there may be other purposes included in the meaning, such as denouncing the fact that the past has left open wounds that should be healed. In the fourth place, these artifacts of memory and forgetfulness do not always signify and symbolize the shared visions of a nation's past: quite the opposite, they may convey the struggles to appropriate the past. In this sense, the connection with the past may be the history of fragments of the past.⁵⁸ Finally, we should emphasize that the history of the places of memory is fundamental if we are to truly comprehend their meaning.

institutions, social peace as well as economic, educational and cultural development (Juan Rial, «El "imaginario social" uruguayo y la dictadura. Los mitos políticos de (re)construcción», in C. Perelli, J. Rial, *De mitos y memorias políticas*, Montevideo, EBO, 1986, pp. 15-36), Uruguay's self-image as a civil, civilized and European nation was blown to pieces during the military-civilian, which led to these debates.

There are many academic studies referring to the identity issue after the dictatorship ended. For instance see Achugar, «El presente...». In Allier (*Une histoire...*, op. cit.) there is a detailed list of texts.

⁵⁸ Hartog, «Temps...», op. cit.

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