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## CHAPTER 2

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# Polarised Topography of Rival Memories: The Commemorations of the 11th March 2004 Train Bombings in Madrid

*G r me Truc and Cristina S nchez-Carretero*

The commemorative practices of the 11th March 2004 train bombings in Madrid (11-M) involve many aspects, where mourning is linked to political protests, solidarity with the victims, and rejection of terrorism or anti-war sentiment. This chapter is centred on how individuals and organisations appropriate sites and enact mourning events, as well as the practices involved in the commemoration of anniversaries and the reproduction of these practices over time. We look at certain types of ‘technologies of memory’ drawing on Marita Sturken’s application of Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self. According to Sturken, ‘the memorial is perhaps the most traditional kind of memory object or technology’ (Sturken 1997: 10). In this traditional sense, the term ‘memorial’ classically refers to something material: a monument—a statue or a piece of architecture—or

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a plaque put somewhere as a reminder of what took place there. However, in a broader sense, we can speak about ‘memorial’ to designate various forms of performances, such as commemorative ceremonies, gatherings, concerts, and readings of poems or lists of names (Young 1993). At the intersection of the material and performative is a type of non-institutional memorial: the ‘grassroots memorial’, which consists of the aggregation of flowers, candles, and other ephemeral memorabilia. This type of memorial could be observed in Madrid after the 11-M attacks (Sánchez-Carretero 2011; Truc 2018), as well as after other traumatic events (Santino 2006; Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011).

By focusing on the spatial dimension of the memorialisation process, this chapter explores the tension between these different forms of memorials, and shows how it can lead to a topographic polarisation within the city landscape in relation to rivalries between groups that do not remember an event in the same way, or do not commemorate it for the same purposes. In the first section, we start by exploring the array of commemorative events after the 11-M attacks, with special focus on the differences between official memorials and grassroots memorials, and follow with an analysis of their spatial dynamics. In the second and third sections, we move to the results of our investigation, based primarily on ethnographic observations of the different memorial sites from the second to the seventh anniversaries of 11-M attacks and in particular those around the Atocha train station, from 2005 to 2011. We show how tensions and rivalries around memorial sites that appear in the anniversaries progressively constructed a polarised topography of 11-M memories in the Spanish capital.

### OFFICIAL MEMORIALS, GRASSROOTS MEMORIALS AND TRAUMATIC EVENTS: THE SPATIAL DIMENSION OF COMMEMORATIONS

Conflicts are symbolically negotiated in the ways they are remembered and commemorated; conversely, contested performances express and reproduce uneasy memories of conflicts. This is not only relevant to how wars and battles are commemorated; other types of traumatic events also use the same technologies of memory. For instance, the untimely death of people as a result of a natural catastrophe, random acts of violence or a terrorist attack can similarly provoke traumatic memory and result in col-

lective acts of remembrance. Here, we use the expression ‘traumatic event’ to refer to an event that provokes reactions in society at large that go beyond the mourning process that an individual faces when s/he suffers a loss. Deaths that provoke the type of reactions such as those observed after the 11-M attacks can be described as ‘traumatic’ in this sense (Alexander 2012; Edkins 2003). The mourners did not necessarily know the deceased, but they nonetheless expressed a shared feeling of bereavement and showed a need to participate in mourning and memorial practices.

As part of commemorations, various sites can be used or created: for instance, monuments, cemeteries, museums, and plaques on streets and buildings—memorial in a traditional sense. Other commemorative practices, however, are ephemeral, constituted by activities that leave no permanent traces and constitute memorial performances like concerts, festivals, demonstrations. In both cases, these sites and events can be linked to heritage. As Viejo-Rose points out, ‘there are other important elements in maintaining a “memory” of traumatic historical events that are more explicitly linked to heritage: ritualized commemorative events and anniversaries, monuments, museum collections, archives, cemeteries, and re-enactments’ (Viejo-Rose 2011a: 59). More than two decades ago, Sider and Smith (1997) dedicated a volume to how commemorations and the silences that surround them come into being and are institutionalised. Anniversaries, as a type of commemorations, are also constructed in relation to silences and make sense because of the silences that surround the event. These are silences in a double sense: the silence of the rest of the year, because an anniversary cannot exist if every day the same event is commemorated, and also the silence of the ‘others’ who are not commemorated in the anniversary.<sup>1</sup> The silences of Spain’s recent past, in particular, the silences surrounding the conflicted relationship with the victims of the Civil War (1936–1939), have modelled memorialscapes in Spain (Viejo-Rose 2011b). These silences are materialised in who gets to be commemorated and by whom, and this in turn is at the base of the conflicts of memories and the polarisation process of memorial sites.

### *Traumatic Events and Memorialisation Processes*

A common phenomenon in response to traumatic events today is the appearance of grassroots memorials—also called spontaneous shrines—on sites associated with the event. This particular type of commemorative practice does not necessarily intend to be permanent, yet it often follows a

clear material pattern and design, without being arranged by a constituted group or organisation (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2011: 3; Ortiz 2011; Sánchez-Carretero 2011; Truc 2018). Grassroots memorials are usually created at the place where the death occurred instead of the sanctioned sites for conducting mourning rituals, such as cemeteries, churches, or secular places such as morgues. As such, they can be seen as the expression of non-institutional initiatives to memorialise a site in relation to what took place there, and reciprocally to keep in this exact place the memory of the traumatic event.

In this sense, grassroots memorials are not to be confused with official memorials. Margry and Sánchez-Carretero (2011) coined the term ‘grassroots memorials’ to overcome the interpretative shortcomings of previous ways of referring to this phenomenon, such as ‘spontaneous shrines’ (Santino 1992, 2004, 2006; Grider 2001, 2007), ‘improvised memorials’ (Margry and Sánchez-Carretero 2007) or ‘temporary memorials’ (Doss 2008).

The ritual practice of grassroots memorials arises when the death of ‘others’ is particularly shocking to society at large, and it has become an expected response in recent decades. Grassroots memorials indicate levels of social distress experienced in response to a particular event in ways that other memorials might not; they signal an event that is felt as traumatic by a group. These memorials differ from official memorials because of their ephemerality, their necessarily performative character and their tendency to make demands. By the latter, we mean that they ask for action to be taken, even if it is expressed through questions—‘Why?’—or outrage—‘This shouldn’t have happened!’ As Santino points out, commemorating death is often used to address or change a situation or condition (Santino 2011: 70), and grassroots memorials respond to traumatic events through a communicative gesture that asks for action. The memorials not only aim to commemorate the death or deaths but also to express various emotions, to protest, to vindicate, or to demand that similar tragedies should not be repeated. In this respect, the 11-M attacks have also marked a shift in how victims of violence are publicly memorialised in Spain, in particular, incorporating grassroots memorialisation alongside more established forms.

### *The Politics of the Victims Associations Linked to 11-M*

On 11 March 2004, ten bombs exploded at approximately 7:30 a.m. in four commuter trains located in Atocha, El Pozo, Santa Eugenia train sta-

tions and Téllez Street, a small alleyway located just before the trains' entrance to Atocha station. The number of victims officially recognised after the court hearing was 191 deceased and 1858 injured. The political context in which the bombings occurred is an important element in understanding the meanings of the sites of memory and their evolution over the years. The attacks were perpetrated three days before the Spanish general election. The results of the election made the socialist Rodríguez Zapatero the head of the new government while the conservative Aznar from the party *Partido Popular* (PP) lost the election. Various interpretations of the events offered different explanations about the responsibility for the bombings and the relationship between the attacks and the change in government (Bali 2007; Fishman 2007).

A 'conspiracy' theory about the responsibility for the bombings—linking ETA, the socialist party, and Al-Qaeda—was alive for a decade, supported in particular by a group called *Peones Negros Libres*, and some associations of victims. The mediatisation of this conspiracy narrative and the political instrumentalisation of the victims had serious implications in terms of memorialisation and the tensions that arose at subsequent anniversaries. The *Peones Negros Libres* use the slogan 'we want to know the truth'. That phrase was repeatedly employed just after the attacks in protests against the allegedly misleading information provided by the then Aznar's government right before the 2004 general elections. The *Peones* appropriated the slogan, the site of Atocha, and the use of grassroots memorials while changing their original meaning. They turned the sentence 'we want to know the truth' into a symbol of their conspiracy theory.

The victims' associations were also politicised and instrumentalised by the media and the local government of Madrid. There are three victims' associations, two of them dedicated exclusively to 11-M victims (*Asociación 11-M Afectados de Terrorismo* and *Asociación de Ayuda a las Víctimas del 11-M*) and a third, AVT (*Asociación Víctimas de Terrorismo*), which was founded in 1981 and is mainly formed by ETA victims but includes some victims from the 11-M attacks. In addition, the *Fundación Víctimas de Terrorismo* is an overarching structure that includes all these groups plus other associations and foundations. The AVT gathers a significant number of victims of ETA and is a powerful lobby in Spain, particularly close to the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP). The *Asociación de Ayuda a las Víctimas del 11-M* (AAV11-M) was founded in 2004 with the help of AVT and with the more specific aim of 'supporting 11-M victims'; however, this association has dwindled in size, due to a lack of subscriptions and insufficient



financial support. The *Asociación 11-M Afectados de Terrorismo* (A11-M), is the most active one—in the timeframe analysed in this chapter, 2005–2011—and has the most members linked directly to the 11-M attacks. Certain conservative press outlets associate this group with the socialist party, an idea that is not supported by the association itself.

### *The Spatial Dimension of Memory Rivalries*

In relation to the plurality of groups linked to 11-M, the commemorations of the 11-M attacks are characterised by a multiplicity of sites and claims. First of all, there is the multiplicity of sites that were affected by the explosions and into which eventually grassroots memorials were incorporated. As mentioned earlier, four sites were involved: the stations of Atocha, Santa Eugenia, and El Pozo, and the railway tracks located along Téllez Street. Secondly, one can look at the multiple ways of collectively memorialising these attacks: above and beyond the victims' association, many groups of people, affected to varying degrees and each with its own perspective, became the 'audience' for commemorations. As in any traumatic event, the memory of 11-M includes multi-layered perspectives and claims depending on these audiences: it is not the same in Madrid as in the rest of Spain, in Europe or other parts of the world. It is not the same for the direct victims, for the people close to them, for those who helped at the scene of the attacks, for those who were victims of attacks other than the ones in Madrid, or for the people who have never been directly involved in any attack whatsoever and followed the 11-M events through the media.

As a result of such multiplicity, every year on the 11-M anniversary in Madrid alone over ten different memorial acts are organised and promoted by various authorities (e.g. the city hall, regional presidency, national government, and European institutions) and civil society actors (e.g. associations of victims, neighbourhood associations, and political associations). Another consequence of this multiplicity is that the location of memorial acts and ceremonies shifts from one year to the next, and groups with different memories of the event, such as victims' associations, manifest their rivalry in the proximity to the sites of the attacks. Both the spatial shifting and the rivalries exemplify the sociological principle highlighted by Maurice Halbwachs (2008) that in order to remain vivid, memories need to be localised. In other words, for memory to be maintained and transmitted through time, it needs to become situated spatially (Truc 2012a). The act of remembering what *took place* involves the capacity to identify a

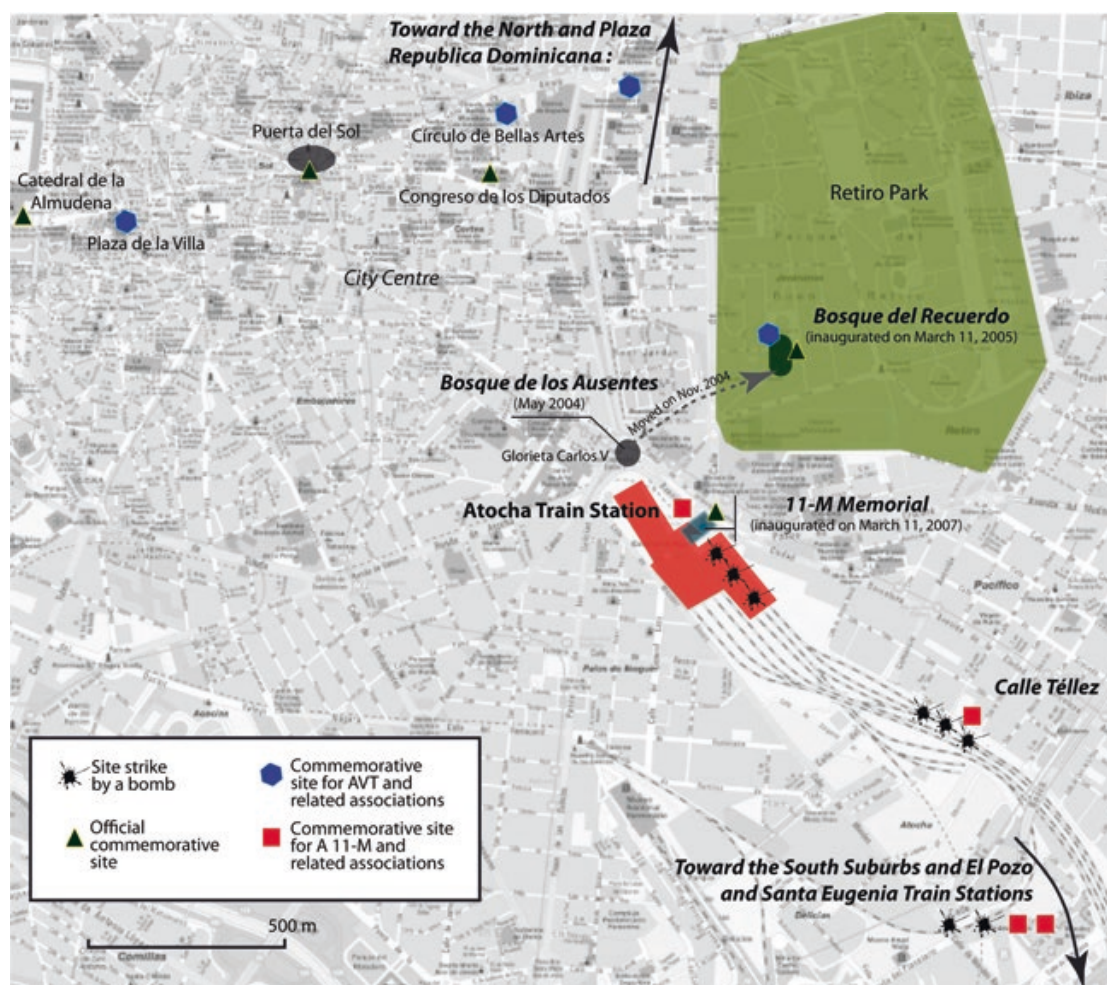
place. This might be the reason why the four sites hit by the 11-M attacks immediately became the objects of spontaneous memorialisation, achieved through the creation of grassroots memorials aiming at maintaining the memory of the exact places where people lost their lives. For this same reason, several official monuments built in memory of the victims have been inaugurated since 2004 in different places.

Sites of spontaneous memorialisation are often turned into places of institutionalised memory: today there are monuments near each of the stations involved in the 11-M attacks (along with the Alcalá de Henares station where the terrorists and several of their victims boarded the trains). This transformation is neither systematic nor the corollary of grassroots memorials. On the contrary, sometimes there may be a desire to avoid the permanent transformation of sites into official places of memory and remove traces of the tragedy. As we will see below, this is partly what has happened after 11-M within the Atocha station itself. At the same time, there can be attempts to create ad hoc official memorials elsewhere, in places not directly linked to the commemorated event but rather chosen according to criteria such as accessibility and availability for memorial practices. For instance, a *Bosque del Recuerdo* (Forest of Remembrance) for the attacks was inaugurated in March 2005 inside the Retiro Park, where no bomb attack occurred on 11th March. In such a case, a tension between grassroots memorials, attached to the exact place of the event, and such ad hoc memorial sites can arise, as these are aimed at convincing people to gather elsewhere than at the exact place where the event occurred.

As a result of these issues, four distinct changes in memorial practices related to 11-M have been observed in Madrid from 2004 to 2011:

1. There has been an increase in and a spatial diffusion of the places affected by 11-M remembrance, extending beyond the actual sites where the bombs exploded.
2. The dates, number, and type of commemorative events have not been firmly established from one year to the next.
3. Rival commemorative aims and tensions among the various organising bodies resulted in events being scheduled at different sites but at the same time, or in the same place but at different times.
4. The appropriation of certain official memorial places by some groups to the detriment of others has led to a polarisation of 11-M memories within the topographical space of the city of Madrid (see Fig. 2.1).





**Fig. 2.1** Map of Madrid that includes places of the bombings, the commemorative sites linked to AVT and related associations, and A11-M and related associations. (Source: G r me Truc and Anxo Rodr guez Paz)

As we will see next, behind empirically observable topographical phenomena, there lie both shifting relationships among the range of 11-M memories and an evolution of the significance assigned by different groups to the event.

### AT THE CENTRE OF COMMEMORATION: THE CONFLICTIVE MEMORIALISATION OF ATOCHA TRAIN STATION

The American geographer Kenneth E. Foote has proposed a typology of the fate of sites that have been hit by a ‘traumatic’ event, such as a massacre or an attack, distinguishing between obliteration, rectification,

designation, and sanctification (Foote 2003). Obliteration consists of the destruction and deletion of all traces of the event where it has taken place, in order to give the impression that it never happened. In Spain this is the case, for instance, with Civil War-related mass graves and, in a more general sense, all those that Joël Candau defined as ‘places of amnesia’ (2005: 125). In the case of ‘rectification’, the site of the event is modified in a way that aims at removing all those elements that might bring back painful memories, without necessarily attempting to erase all traces of the event. This is a common practice adopted in cases of industrial disasters or plane crashes, for instance. Designation is the creation of an indicator that ‘something’ has taken place on that site or in its proximity. The best example of this is the use of commemorative plaques. It often accompanies rectification and sanctification.

Finally, Foote identifies sanctification of a site when it is materially and ritually altered by some form of memorial practice by a group, or a community, affected by the event:

Sanctification is a natural response to the grief of community loss. The creation of memorials both honors the victims of the disaster and helps the community to mourn. Relatively few tragedies result in sanctification, however. Many factors are involved, but the most important is whether the tragedy touches a single, relatively homogeneous, self-identified community, one that comes to view the tragedy as a common, public loss. Members of such communities share a sense of identity [...] that encourages them to view the disaster as a loss to the group as a whole rather than as losses to isolated individuals and families. (Foote 2003: 15–16)

According to Foote, then, sanctification does not necessarily involve a religious or spiritual component, but rather the observance of rituals surrounding the memorial site.

The case of the Atocha station suggests that, with time, several types of response can coexist at the same site. Right after the 11-M attacks the station, having been their epicentre, became the site of spontaneous sanctification which took the form of grassroots memorials created and visited by thousands of people who prayed at them and which were maintained within the station premises until June 2004. Like Ground Zero in New York after 9/11, Atocha became what Randall Collins calls ‘the central sacred place for the commemorative cult’ (Collins 2004: 72). It was not, however, realistic that the main train station in Madrid, a place where

tens of thousands of travellers transit every day, could be permanently filled by such an accumulation of flowers, candles, messages, and a variety of objects. In an open letter written on 31 May 2004, the station's employees declared that it had become very hard for them to work with the daily reminder of the dramatic event, and expressed their wish to remove the grassroots memorials and replace them with a permanent yet more discrete artefact.<sup>2</sup> That was the first step of Atocha's process of rectification.

### *The Memorial Rectification of Atocha Station as Contested Process*

Once the grassroots memorials were withdrawn, rectification was realised through the inauguration, on 9 June 2004, of a new installation replacing the spontaneous sanctification of the station with a 'virtual sanctuary' as defined by the Minister who presided over the opening.<sup>3</sup> The installation, called *Espacio de Palabras* (Space of Words), was made up of video monitors and interactive terminals that allowed anyone to write messages of sympathy for the victims. Atocha's cleaning staff was also ordered to prevent anyone from leaving objects in the station premises and to clean any graffiti. The same installation was set up at the stations of El Pozo and Santa Eugenia. These installations, which remained active until the summer of 2007, were in turn removed shortly after the opening of an official monument dedicated to the victims in Atocha station, in an event organised on the third anniversary of the attacks.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these measures, on every anniversary of the attacks between 2005 and 2007 grassroots memorials continued to appear spontaneously inside the Atocha station, although they never lasted more than 24 hours because of the instructions to the cleaning staff. The resurgence of these acts of sanctification, according to Foote's categories, went against official attempts at the station's rectification. This caused tension as observed during field research at the site of Atocha: for instance, people would refuse to use the interactive terminals (which were judged as too impersonal) and insist on leaving handwritten messages or graffiti; others directed their frustration at the cleaning staff when they were seen to be throwing away flowers or extinguishing candles recently deposited in the memory of the victims (Truc and Bazin, 2019). While tensions were still heated on the second anniversary of the attacks in 2006, they diminished because of more acts of rectification and eventually faded away. After 2007, on every anniversary of the attacks spontaneous memorials in Atocha dwindled from year to year, until they almost entirely disappeared (see Fig. 2.2 a–c).





**Fig. 2.2** (a–c) Evolution of grassroots memorials in Atocha from 2006 (a), 2007 (b) to 2009 (c). (Source: G r me Truc)

On 11 March 2011, one could only spot a few bunches of flowers, candles, and other objects left by people inside the station, while there were practically no messages, compared to the thousands of messages and objects deposited in 2004 and 2005 and the several hundred still visible in 2006. By contrast, as we shall see, grassroots memorials are still significantly present at the other sites affected by the attacks, T llez Street and El Pozo and Santa Eugenia stations.

The rectification of Atocha station is unlikely to have occurred if it had not been for other 11-M memorial areas being ‘designated’ at the same time. In May 2004, a small memorial garden was built, with 192 cypress and olive trees symbolising the total number of victims—191 dead in the trains, plus a policeman who died during the assault on the perpetrators’ apartment a few days later. Formerly known as the *Bosque de los Ausentes* (Forest of the Departed), it was eventually renamed *Bosque del Recuerdo* (Forest of Remembrance) after a request from the victims’ relatives. Originally built in front of the station for the occasion of the wedding of

the then Prince Felipe—currently King Felipe VI of Spain—this garden was moved to the Retiro Park a few hundred metres north of the station in the autumn of 2004. It was the first official 11-M memorial and was officially inaugurated on the first anniversary of the attacks, on 11 March 2005. In addition, a few weeks after the attacks a commemorative plaque was put on the façade of the Presidency of the Region building, situated in the square at *Puerta del Sol*, in the heart of Madrid, where it matched the commemorative plaque for Madrid’s popular uprising against Napoleon’s troops, the famous ‘2 de mayo’ [2 of May].

### *The 11-M Monument: An ‘Empty’ Memorial?*

All these memorial markers installed in the very centre of the city provided some response to people’s need for a site until a monument in memory of the 11-M victims could be constructed. A project for such a monument was initiated in July 2004, corresponding with the start of the rectification process of Atocha station. Rapidly, the decision was taken to build it in the middle of the *Puerta de Atocha*, right in front of the main station entrance, where emergency services parked on the day of the bombings and victims escaped of the station. The chosen project, conceived by a team of five young architects, the FAM Studio, included two parts: a very abstract cylinder-like glass monument, situated in the middle of a roundabout; and a room for meditation located beneath this glass monument, inside the train station (see Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). Due to technical problems, its construction lasted over two years. The opening was scheduled for the first, then the second anniversary of the attacks, but did not take place until three years after the event, on 11 March 2007. People’s expectations for the monument were high, and a large crowd of spectators gathered around Atocha station for the opening ceremony, perhaps also because the day happened to be a Sunday.

The inauguration could not, however, have fallen on a worse date: in March 2007, the trial against the perpetrators of the 11-M attacks had already been going on for a month, and the already tense atmosphere was exacerbated by rivalries arising between different groups who held on to different memories and who supported opposite theories about the perpetrators and the reasons for the attacks. Other tensions arose from the fact that Spain would hold its next general elections within a year, and that the opposition party, *Partido Popular*, never ceased attacking the political measures taken by Zapatero’s Government against terrorism. In the wake



**Figs. 2.3 and 2.4** Atocha 11-M monument from the inside (Fig. 2.3) and an external view (Fig. 2.4). (Source: G r me Truc)



of the inauguration in Atocha, several thousand people crowded the streets of Madrid and demonstrated in defence of the Spanish Constitution. These tensions led to open conflict among those who had come to witness the inauguration. Especially after the ceremony when several hundred people assembled at the monument, verbal fights started between groups lasting for several hours, until the police dispersed the protesters (Truc 2011b).

Thus, the main official 11-M memorial immediately failed to be the consensual and unifying place of memory it was supposed to be. Its creation also disappointed some of the victims of the attacks. The project originally consisted of a glass cylinder through which, from the room beneath, one should have been able to read the list of the names of the deceased on the train attacks. On the day of the inauguration, without notice, the victims and their families learned that the list of names had been replaced by a number of sympathy messages, selected among those collected at the station right after the attacks. The public authorities promoting the project had decided to place a copy of the nominative list of the deceased in the entrance to the monument, where it is impossible to stop and meditate in memory of someone.<sup>5</sup> Not only did the victims and victims' families find out about this change the opening day, but they were also more shocked when they discovered several spelling mistakes in the list. As a result, when we asked about this monument to the vice-president of the association *11-M Afectados del Terrorismo*, his first reaction was to say: 'This is not our monument!'<sup>6</sup>

As a result, during the official commemoration organised the following year by the Spanish State at the monument, on 11 March 2008, many seats that had been reserved for the victims and victims' families remained empty. And since no other official commemoration has been organised in front of it even, for the tenth anniversary of the attacks: on 11 March 2014, the national ceremony, held in the presence of the Royal family, took place in the Almudena Cathedral. At the very most the mayor of Madrid laid a wreath in the room beneath the monument on each anniversary of the attacks, during an act that lasts no more than a few minutes, sometimes along with representatives of the Spanish Government.

Without going so far as to say that Atocha station is now a place for oblivion rather than of memory, it is clear that rectification, in Kenneth E. Foote's terms, globally has prevailed. Another good illustration of the prevalence of rectification over sanctification of Atocha station in relation to 11-M memory is given by the fact that hardly any sign indicates the

monument's location. The architects designed a specific signalisation, but the Madrid authorities never put it into place.<sup>7</sup> In other words, people who already have the 11-M attacks in mind can find it and understand its meaning; meanwhile, many others can pass by the memorial without remembering the train bombings. The architects who conceived this memorial had named their project 'blue emptiness', since it had to represent the emptiness that was left by the death of 191 people; and the monument is not only symbolically 'empty', but also physically so, as no objects are allowed to be deposited within it, and as the room is pressurised and, for this reason, candles cannot burn. This official memorial is therefore in sharp contrast with the grassroots memorials that preceded it, in which candles were an essential component. Thus, in many respects, we can say that the creation of an official memorial at Atocha station has paradoxically contributed to empty the place of symbols attached to the memory of 11-M. But it is striking to observe that, meanwhile, 11-M memorialisation practices have been strengthened in other places.

### BEYOND ATOCHA: THE TOPOGRAPHIC POLARISATION OF 11-M MEMORIAL SITES

The inauguration of the monument dedicated to 11-M victims in Atocha was the crowning achievement of the growing 'war for memories' that developed around the attacks because it allowed an encounter between audiences who otherwise take part in different yearly 11-M commemorative events. As mentioned earlier, one could generally observe at this time in Madrid over ten different memorial acts on each 11-M anniversary, characterised by spatio-temporal polarisation. Commemorative practices were held at the same location but at different times, whereas others were held at the same time but at different locations (See Figs. 2.5a, b).

A significant example of the first case (same place different times) is the fact that since 2007 both the CC.OO and UGT unions,<sup>8</sup> together with the Actors' Union and the association *11-M Afectados del Terrorismo* (A11-M) have organised a yearly ceremony at the entrance to the Atocha station at around 10 a.m. On the same day, all public authorities (including the Mayor of Madrid or the Spanish government, depending on the year) participate in a different ceremony, generally scheduled around 12 p.m. (e.g. this was the case in 2007 for the monument's inauguration); the action group *Peones Negros Libres* also organises a gathering every year

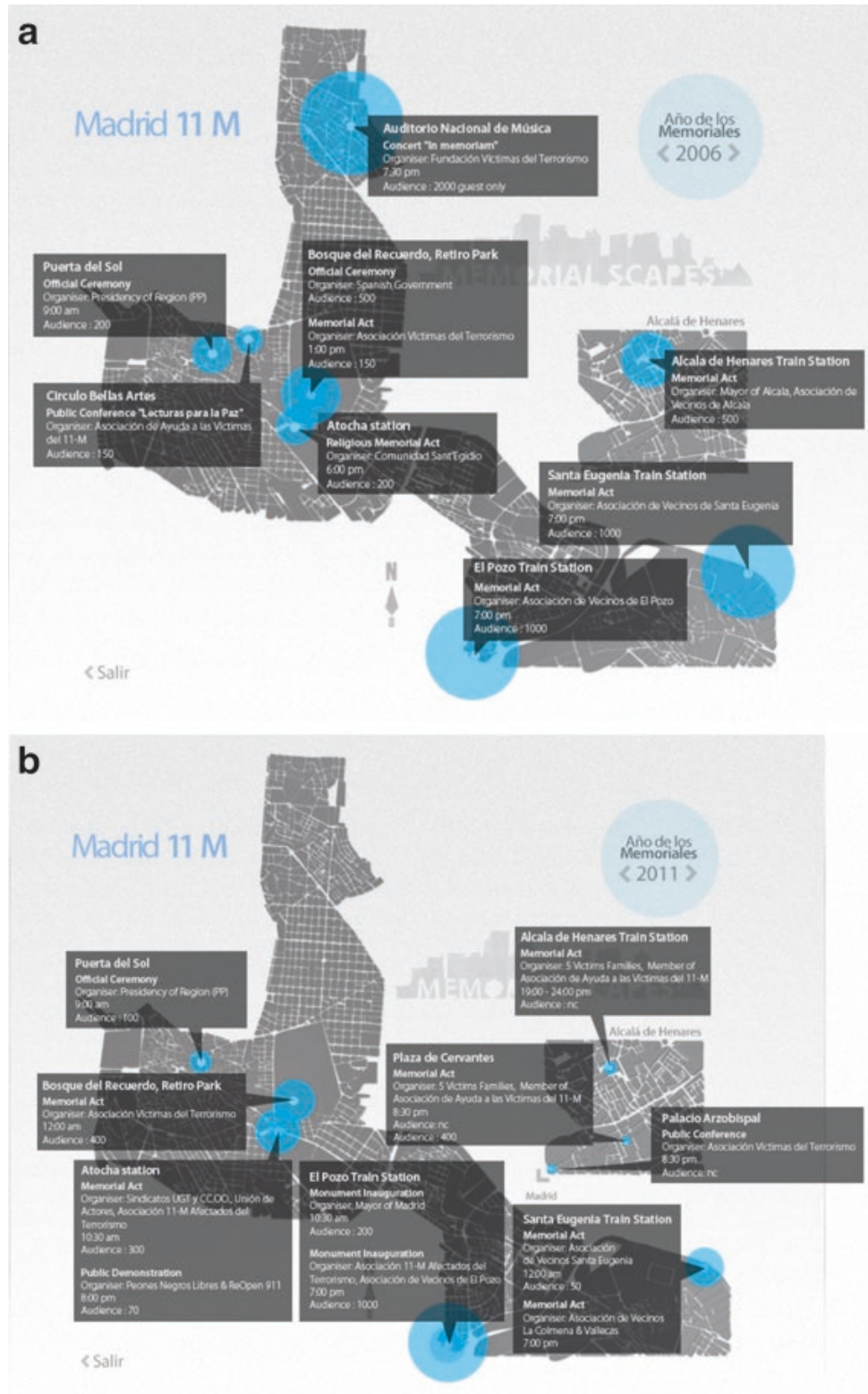


Fig. 2.5 (a, b) Official commemorations in 2006 and 2011 at the different sites. (Source: Juan Pablo Venditti)

at the same location, always at 8 p.m.. Sometimes, misunderstandings can arise and interfere with the separate use of the same space; for instance, in 2010 the Mayor of Madrid went to lay a wreath at Atocha station at 10 a.m. (instead of the usual 12 p.m.) while, at the same time, both CC. OO and UGT unions and the A11-M attended their usual commemoration ceremony outside of the station. Therefore, on that day, two rival ceremonies took place simultaneously at Atocha, a few metres apart, with their participants doing their best to avoid each other.

An example of the second scenario (same time different places) is that in 2009 the A11-M organised a ceremony in Téllez Street at 12:30 p.m., while the *Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo* (AVT), along with the *Asociación de Ayuda a las Víctimas del 11-M* (AAV11-M), held its own ceremony at the same time in the Retiro. The same scenario has been repeated since then. A11-M pays tribute to the memory of the victims at 12 p.m. on 11 March at sites where the attacks took place—Téllez Street in 2009, Santa Eugenia in 2010, and El Pozo in 2011—while at the same time AVT (with the AAV11-M) holds a ceremony in the Retiro. Rival commemorative events around 11-M are therefore characterised by topographic polarisation, which has strengthened over the years: certain groups choose to keep their memories alive by organising events in sites originally affected by the attacks and marked by grassroots memorials, whereas other groups decisively turn towards official memorials.

### *The Ideological Appropriation of a Memorial Site*

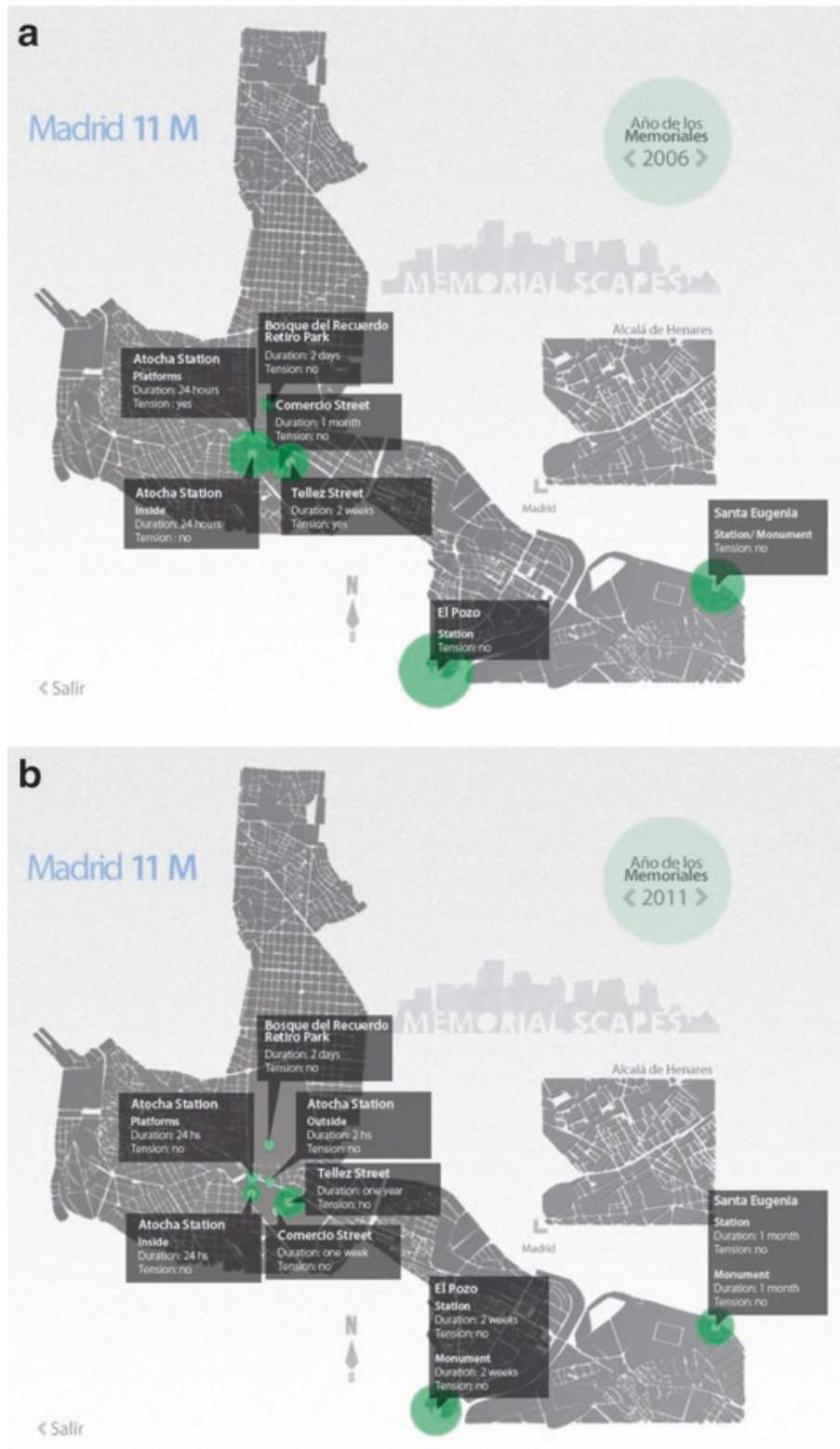
The AVT, which tends to appropriate the *Bosque del Recuerdo* placed inside the Retiro Park, has existed, as explained in the first section, since long before the 11th March 2004 attacks. It has become the main advocate of the non-specificity of the 11-M attacks, reducing them to the status of a terrorist attack so to speak ‘like any other’. The association equates it to attacks carried out by ETA and refuses to distinguish between different forms of ‘terrorism’ claiming that an involvement of ETA in the 11-M attacks cannot be excluded (although neither the police enquiries nor the trial to 11-M initiators were able to substantiate this theory). As a result, every time the AVT organises a commemorative event on 11th March, even today, this is done less to pay a tribute to the ‘11-M anniversary’ than to mark the European Day for Victims of Terrorism (declared to be on 11th March), a commemorative event that the association pushed European institutions to adopt with the support of some elected members



of the European People's Party (Truc 2012b). The AVT was never keen to organise ceremonies at the original locations where 11-M attacks took place. On the contrary, since 2005 it has organised its own commemorative event inside the Retiro Park, far from all the grassroots memorials. As no official ceremony has been organised at the *Bosque del Recuerdo* since 2006—the place having been superseded by the Atocha monument—the AVT has effectively appropriated the *Bosque* and has organized its commemorative event there on every 11th March.

The *Bosque del Recuerdo* is the only 11-M memorial site in Madrid that is topographically apart from the original sites where the attacks were memorialised in 2004. For example, in the square at Puerta del Sol, where a commemorative plaque was put a few weeks after the attacks to honour those who helped the victims, and where both the Regional Presidency and the Mayor of Madrid organise, in the morning of every 11th March, a commemorative ceremony, people spontaneously gathered in 2004 in order to show their indignation and their solidarity towards the victims; and grassroots memorials were created there, just as inside the premises of all the stations involved in the attacks and in Téllez Street. Nothing of the sort ever happened at the Retiro Park, which is perhaps why this space could be appropriated by an action group such as the AVT, whose agenda has always been to use the 11-M commemoration to highlight the more general cause of *all* victims of terrorism. This also explains the fact that, although since its inauguration in 2005 the *Bosque* has hosted some grassroots memorials on 11-M anniversaries, they have been few in number, even fewer than in Atocha where, unlike in the Retiro Park, measures were officially taken to discourage them. Up to 2007, around 50 objects, including flowers, candles, and messages, accumulated each year in the *Bosque del Recuerdo*, compared to hundreds of objects in Atocha. By 2011, the average had fallen to ten objects per year (see Figs. 2.6a, b).

Although the A11-M was originally responsible for changing the Retiro garden's name, its members never really felt a link to this location, which represents, in their eyes, a purely institutional site still largely alien to the perspective of 11-M victims.<sup>9</sup> The president of the A11-M, Pilar Manjón, was present at the national commemorative ceremony organised at the *Bosque* on the second anniversary; but apart from this one instance, the association and its members have otherwise chosen to focus their attention on other commemorative events organised each year at the sites of the attacks. In addition, they also encourage a variety of grassroots initiatives taken at other locations across Spain to honour the memory of 11-M victims.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 2.6** (a, b) Grassroots memorials in 2006 and 2011 at the different sites. (Source: Juan Pablo Venditti)



### *Different Places, Different Meanings*

Since its foundation, the A11-M has prevented public 11-M commemorative acts from taking precedence over the private mourning of the families affected by the attacks, as well as trying to prevent official ceremonies from prevailing over non-official ones, which they define as the ‘*abrazo social*’ (social hug).<sup>11</sup> Both in their speeches and publications, the association’s representatives openly oppose any attempt to transform the 11-M victims into some sorts of ‘heroes’ who died for a greater cause, such as ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, or ‘the Spanish nation’—themes which, by contrast, are located at the heart of the AVT’s narrative.<sup>12</sup> Instead, according to A11-M leaders the people who died on 11 March died *for nothing*, or rather, they did not die *for* some cause as much as they died *because* of the war in Iraq and the foreign policy of Aznar’s government.<sup>13</sup>

In the first couple of years of the 11-M anniversary events, several central areas of Madrid not directly connected with the attacks were also used by the two rival associations, each with distinct memorial interpretations of 11-M. This was the case of two prestigious cultural centres, the *Ateneo* and the *Circulo de Bellas Artes*. The latter notably became the stage of the on-going antagonism between the associations: in 2006, AVT and AAV11-M chose the location to celebrate the Second European Day for Victims of Terrorism and organised a public event there at 11 a.m., whereas in 2008 and 2009, exactly at the same time and in the same place, both the CC.OO and UGT unions, along with the Actors’ Union and the A11-M, held commemorative acts there in memory of 11-M victims. Nearby, in the Spanish Parliament, the Spanish Foundation of Victims of Terrorism organised a commemorative event on 11 March 2010 that exceptionally brought together the representatives of all associations among whose members were 11-M victims. The event was broadcast on television and aimed at pacifying the controversies that had been provoked annually by rival commemorative events until then, but it did not replace the commemorations organised by these associations on the day. Such a unifying commemorative event, organised in the centre of the city and at the heart of one of the most important sites of political power in Spain, thus represented a very occasional counter-example, a kind of exception confirming the rule: that of the topographical polarisation of the collective memories of the 11-M attacks.

In 2011 like before, people were still assembling on each 11th March at El Pozo and Santa Eugenia stations, as well as in Téllez Street, located

in working-class neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Madrid. They continued to create grassroots memorials there on every anniversary that remained on site for a period of between two weeks and more than a month. Grassroots memorials at Téllez Street have even increased in volume since 2009 when the A11-M first organised a commemorative action attended by around a hundred people. Since then, Téllez Street has partially become a permanent memorial area—a sign that some relatives of the victims have invested in this space, only a few hundred metres from Atocha, in reaction to the rectification of the station. A small garden has been set up by the municipal authorities in front of the railings, replacing what until 2010 was a bare patch of ground, and several engraved memorial plaques have been fixed on the fences along the railroad tracks. In addition, real and plastic flowers are deposited there and not removed from one year to another.

The making of durable grassroots memorials has been supported by the A11-M that has backed neighbourhood associations such as the one that led to the creation of the small garden in Téllez Street. At the same time, the association fought for several years together with the residents of El Pozo to push the city council to finance the construction of a monument at the entrance of the El Pozo station, at the exact place of the former grassroots memorials, on the basis that it was here that most people (68) lost their lives on 11 March 2004. They won their fight and the inauguration of the monument, held on 11 March 2011, exemplified once again the rivalries that have characterised the memory of 11-M events. The A11-M, together with El Pozo residents who were at the origin of the project, had announced the ceremony for 8 p.m. (the usual time for commemorative acts organised in El Pozo on every anniversary of the attacks, as it allows residents to attend the ceremony after work); whereas the city hall authorities unilaterally decreed the ‘official’ inauguration be scheduled at 10.30 a.m.—that is, at a time where the members of the A11-M would be attending another commemorative ceremony in Atocha, along with both CC.OO and UGT unions who, since 2008, have become recurring attendees of such events. The morning ceremony assembled several notables, along with right-wing politicians, some representatives of the associations AVT and AAV11-M, many journalists and a few hundred onlookers (mostly retired people); by contrast, the evening inauguration featured the representatives of the A11-M, together with left-wing politicians and over a thousand residents of all ages. The only person who spoke from the platform at both ceremonies was the monument’s architect.

The preservation of 11-M memory in the places where the attacks occurred is primarily due to the people who were most directly affected by these attacks. Some of those who lost a loved one on that day attempt to preserve his (or her) memory in the exact place where he (or she) lost his (or her) life. In contrast, those who have been more indirectly affected by 11-M attacks accept more easily to commemorate them by using more ad hoc places of memory. Thus, although the AVT became mainly attached to the *Bosque del Recuerdo*, this doesn't prevent some victims' families who are close to this association from taking their own initiative: on the evening of 10 March, they usually organise a wake in the centre of Alcalá de Henares. After that, on the morning of 11 March they retrace the victims' journey at the same hour of the attacks, getting off the trains at every station in order to lay flowers on the platforms: starting from Alcalá de Henares, their first stop is Santa Eugenia, next El Pozo, then Atocha, and finally they reach Téllez Street, on foot. The preservation of grassroots memorials on each and every original site where the attacks occurred, not to mention their institutionalisation realised through permanent monuments, thus relies on the work of individuals who were personally involved with 11-M events. This is, for example, also the case of a Santa Eugenia resident who stands in front of the station, on every morning of 11th March, holding a message in memory of the victims that all passers-by can read.

## CONCLUSIONS

In one of the very first articles published about the commemoration of 11-M attacks, Anna Lisa Tota compares it with the memorialisation of terror attacks in Italy. While many of them are, for fear of the Mafia, subject to what Kenneth E. Foote calls an obliteration of memory, the Bologna train station bombings represents, since its first anniversary on 2 August 1981 a singular case of what she calls a 'perfect remembering' (Tota 2005: 55), supported by the victims' association, civil society and the local government: the attack is commemorated each year with the same ritual, at the same time and in the same place, in front of the station, where a monument has been erected. On the basis of media coverage of the earlier stage of the memorialisation of 11-M attacks, Tota was inclined to think that it would be likely to follow the Bologna's pattern. To her eyes, it seemed quite obvious that Atocha station would quickly become the main memorial site of the 11-M in Madrid, the centre of a commemorative cult identi-

cally reproduced each year (Tota 2005: 75). Nevertheless, years of ethnographic fieldwork reveal a far more complex picture, as we saw here.

Every year in Madrid over ten different commemorative events take place on 11th March, a minority of which is held in Atocha, and official commemorations of the 11-M bombings have not been the same two years in a row. Thus, since 2005, many different places have hosted a variety of memorial acts. The general trend has been one of topographic polarisation throughout the Madrid landscape of rival 11-M memories. Individuals who hold onto their personal memories of the event—for instance, in relation to private mourning—are keen to commemorate at the sites where the attacks occurred. In these same places, grassroots memorials were spontaneously created starting from the day after the bombings and, since then, they have regularly risen from their own ashes. By contrast, those who assimilate 11-M commemoration with public memorialising of all victims of terrorism prefer institutionalised memorial sites located in the city centre with no direct relationship with the original sites of the attacks.

Topographic polarisation is understood as the phenomenon by which different groups bearing their own 11-M memories, and giving to them different meanings, tend increasingly to occupy memorial sites that are distant from each other by organising simultaneously their own commemorative actions. The polarisation means that the public, being unable to attend more than one event at the same time, has to ‘choose a side’. Those for whom the 11-M memory is to be widely incorporated into the memory of ‘all victims of terrorism’—especially because they keep on sustaining the idea of a link between the 11-M events and ETA—gather at certain sites of memory distinct from the areas where, on 11 March 2004, the bombings took place. People who have taken such a stance can be mainly found at the Retiro, as well as near the square of the *Puerta del Sol*, where they attend the yearly morning ceremony organised by both regional and Madrid municipal authorities. In 2008, on the occasion of the European Day for Victims of Terrorism, members of the AVT organised a ceremony at 8 p.m. at the former town hall square, while in 2009, at the same hour, another commemorative event was held at the Square of the Dominican Republic, where one of the worst ETA attacks took place on 14 July 1986.<sup>14</sup> They thus challenged the uniqueness of 11-M attacks by using the 11th March anniversary to mark sites linked to ETA attacks, and, therefore, unrelated to 11-M. Conversely, those for whom the 11-M remains a unique event, set apart from other terrorist attacks Spain has endured, are

more attached to the sites where the attacks occurred as they strive to mark the memory of these events.

These competing groups have in common to have turned away from the official monument built in Atocha station in memory of the victims, where no major national commemoration has been organised since 2008, even for the tenth and the fifteenth anniversaries. In this respect, the Atocha station has become less relevant for memory and mourning: it has gone through a ‘rectification’ process that allows it to be again today a train station before a memorial site. This is further suggested by the fact that the only group who habitually demonstrates at the entrance to the station—not just on 11 March, but on the 11th day of every month—is the *Peones Negros Libres*, an action group formed by people who genuinely believe that 11-M attacks were the result of a conspiracy, that links jihadist terrorism with ETA and the Socialist government; and who loudly claim that they have no relationship with the victims, while declaring that their fight is exclusively carried out in the name of their love of ‘truth’. In addition, this action group linked to extremist right-wing movements carries out monthly performative acts of depositing offerings in front of Atocha’s monument, thus imitating the aesthetics of grassroots memorials that were created at the station after the attacks (Sánchez-Carretero 2011). By doing so, they appropriate the site of Atocha and the pattern of spontaneous memorialisation to fill offerings with new meanings far removed from the original mourning rituals. For example, the *Peones Negros* repeat ‘we want to know the truth’, which is the same sentence repeated by people in the streets immediately after the attacks. For this reason, their acts may be perceived as offensive towards the memory of the victims. But the fact that public authorities tolerate these demonstrations at the entrance to Atocha station, and that no passerby around seems to care about it, also indicates that Atocha is no more the hub of 11-M commemoration.

Whether western societies are currently witnessing a phase of ‘memorial mania’ (Doss 2008), the fact is that memorial practices related to traumatic events have been taking a variety of new forms. Here, our focus has been on anniversaries, as a particular type of memory practice. Anniversaries can be marked for a variety of reasons, but they have in common the celebration<sup>15</sup>—in the Durkheimian sense—of the date when an event took place; and they are performed to commemorate that event in a specific location. To celebrate what took *place* implies to have a site where to commemorate, a memorial site. In the case of anniversaries of *traumatic events*, the memorial site is often the exact site where people died, but, as we have

explored, that is not always the case. In fact, as the 11-M case clearly exemplifies, there can be several memorial sites for conflicting, collective memorialisations. In the case of the Madrid bombings, the polarisation of memorial sites highlights the difficulty of integrating all the different collective memorialisations into a single public memory, promoted by Spanish or Madrid authorities through official commemorations.

## NOTES

1. Regarding the silence of the other, Grider analyses the problematic relationships that arise in the case when perpetrators are also memorialized in the case, for instance, of the Columbine massacre (Grider 2007, 2011).
2. ‘Carta abierta de los trabajadores y trabajadoras de Madrid Atocha Cercanías’, reproduced after the request of the authors on *Rojo y Negro*, a paper published by the CGT trade union (*Confederación General del Trabajo*), on 31st May 2004. This open letter does not mean that the station’s employers were insensitive to the attacks or that they did not take part in the sanctification in their own way: on the contrary, a significant evidence of their active participation is a paper sheet found at the station in June 2004, in which they printed the message ‘The employers of the “Puerta de Atocha” station in Madrid express their sympathy to the victims of the 11-M attack and to their families’ (Document DP-2651 of the Archivo del Duelo, Archivo Histórico Ferroviario, Madrid).
3. Reuters dispatch, 10th June 2004, ‘Atocha acoge un ‘santuario virtual’ por las víctimas del 11-M’.
4. For further information about the device, see Truc (2011a).
5. From an interview of G. Truc with one of the architects of the monument, Madrid, 26th February 2010.
6. From an interview of G. Truc with the Vice-President of the Association ‘11-M. Afectados del Terrorismo’, Fuenlabrada (Madrid), 4th March 2010.
7. From an interview of G. Truc with one of the architects of the monument, Madrid, 26th February 2010.
8. *Comisiones Obreras* (CC.OO) and *Unión General de Trabajadores* (UGT) are the two most important labour unions in Spain.
9. From an interview of G. Truc with the Vice-President of the Association ‘11-M. Afectados del Terrorismo’, Fuenlabrada (Madrid), 4th March 2010.
10. Particularly through the column « Archivo del Recuerdo » published on the magazine *IIMagina*, released by the association since 2010.



11. From a meeting of the authors with the representatives of the association, Madrid, 24th September 2009. On the ‘social hag’ see also Sánchez-Carretero (2011).
12. From an interview of G. Truc with the Vice-President of the Association ‘11-M. Afectados del Terrorismo’, Fuenlabrada (Madrid), 4th March 2010 (interview with A11-M leaders, 4 March 2010). See also the different declarations and published interviews released by the President of the association, Pilar Manjón, over the past ten years, beginning with his speech in front of the 11-M parliamentary commission of investigation on December 2004.
13. From an interview of G. Truc with the Vice-President of the Association ‘11-M. Afectados del Terrorismo’, Fuenlabrada (Madrid), 4th March 2010. On the distinction between ‘dead for the cause of’ / ‘dead because of’, see Barcellini (2010).
14. An attack against Civil Guard buses.
15. See Abrahams (1982, 1987) for a reflection on the vocabulary of celebrations.

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