

Call for papers

“Remembering 20th century massacres” CRHQ-Mémorial de Caen international symposium, 22-24 November 2017

In November 2017, the CRHQ (Centre de Recherche d’Histoire Quantitative – Centre for Research in Quantitative History) and the Mémorial de Caen are organising an international symposium entitled “Remembering 20th century massacres (or mass crimes)”. The symposium will focus on different memory-based positions/situations and their social and political impact and purpose in the societies in question, particularly among former belligerents – denial, negation, oblivion, confession, pardon, the conflict between memories etc. – and will cover all the different parties involved (persecutors, victims, witnesses).

From the Herero genocide of 1904, enacted by the colonial German army in Namibia, to the massacres of the 1990s, of the Tutsi people by the Hutu government in Rwanda or of Muslim Bosnians in Srebrenica by the Serbian army, the horror of mass slaughter has punctuated the whole of the 20th century. The recurrence of Balkan massacres ever since 1913, the extermination of Armenians during the First World War, the slaughter of Anatolian Greeks by Ottoman troops in the early 1920s, the terror, planned famine and large-scale purge of Soviet Russia during the 1930s, the Japanese massacres in China, particularly in Nanking, the extermination of Jews and Romani by Nazi Germany and the war of annihilation in the East during the Second World War, as well as the ethnic cleansing and civil war crimes that followed the return to peace, the massacres during decolonisation and the Cold War, the mass slaughters in China during the cultural revolution, the ethnic cleansing in Cambodia, which was then Democratic Kampuchea, and many more such crimes. Since 2008, following the initiative of Jacques Sémelin, the majority of these acts of slaughter have been brought together in an online encyclopaedia (<http://www.massviolence.org/>).

We would like to point out that the 2017 symposium will be focusing on the **memory of genocide and not on the genocide itself**, with a particular focus on the perception that societies had and/or still have, through their official bodies but also without overlooking the point of view of “ordinary” people and public demonstrations of this perception. This aspect is important in that it suggests that we must also include the memory of acts of mass slaughter such as the strategic bombing of cities during the Second World War, which could be seen as mass crimes by some of their survivors or by the descendants of their victims. This choice also encourages us to dissociate the scale of the crimes studied and the way we remember them. It also calls raises a number of questions and offers lines of thought, particularly in relation to the following themes:

Massacre and memory

We can first of all look at the question of identification or memory efficiency concerning the “mass” dimension of the crime. In memorial space, which Maurice Halbwachs suggested was a collective space, when does genocide begin and when does this collective conscience appear? Although numbers – of victims and perpetrators – are of obvious importance, can we actually define thresholds or symbolic criteria to characterize the phenomenon? Does the nature of the actual events, and what has been termed further violence, influence how memory qualifies

the facts? These questions and their corollaries can be summarised in the following way – how does the nature of events affect how we remember them? To ensure we provide a balanced approach, we will give priority to studies of lesser known or less researched cases.

Memories and words

Mass slaughter, whether through famine in Ukraine or of Jews in gas chambers, generates different versions of dialogue and transmission that are defined by the words chosen. Words are a key element of issues surrounding memory – *mass crimes* or collective (or mass) *massacres*, *genocide*, appropriation in the form of claims of specific uniqueness as Jewish memory evolves (*Holocaust*, *Shoah*), *ethnocide*, *ethnic cleansing* or *purification*, “*strategic*” bombings that elude the massacre of civilians... Words carry the memories of which they are the lethal signifiers. They adapt our memories according to the socio-political requirements of the day and are often the constituent signs of this manipulation.

Memory amplified or amputated

Mass crimes can also be invented or amplified and can uncover unfounded truths in our imagination. Such is the case in certain denominations that tend to exaggerate the facts in order to better serve the interests of the moment. For example, the expression “*untamed cleansing*” appeared in France during the 1980s in reference, contrary to all scientific census, to deaths caused by acts of violence during the Liberation in 1944. Beyond the rigour of numbers there are some massacres that, although proportionally far from comparable with so-called “mass crimes”, can nevertheless be claimed as such in partisan (re)construction of memory or under the influence of a “hero-victim” effect. Conversely, we can study the specific conditions that prevented or that still prevent public recognition of unknown or little known mass crimes.

Contentious memory

Usually shown to be, at one time or another, competing and/or conflicting, memory processes relating to mass crimes are characterised, depending on points of view or on the parties involved, by affirmation or silence, and by claim or denial. They become even more complex when social or ethnic groups become in succession, and often in a spirit of retaliation, perpetrators and victims. Memories are taken hostage by forgetting. Buried, put to sleep, then awakened to emerge, first contested then recognised and legitimised. At the emotional root of society, every collective trauma experiences a form of autonomy as it is placed in our memory, since it is subjected to the multiple issues of the present day. Here we will be particularly focusing on studies that concentrate on the historical framework of these phenomena by putting them in context.

Places of memory

Clearly, museums, memorials and other commemorative monuments are precious indicators of memory, as indeed is the social debate that surrounds their creation. The same goes for their public use and the various official or unofficial justifications that advocate the necessity of visiting them (e.g. the debate surrounding Auschwitz), as well as how they are received and the meaning that can be attributed to visitor numbers. These indicators of memory evolve through time and frequently undergo shifts in their identity, most often from wartime to peacetime. These places (totems?) are sometimes the remnants of changes to social demand or the signs of a shift in political use of the past. Their evolution from museums of war to museums of peace is often the sign, once the period of anger and recrimination has passed, of a first step

towards reconciliation with the former aggressor. Is it therefore possible to ask who suffers from war in these museums? The example provided by Japanese museums (about 3.1 million Japanese people died for 20 million victims of the war of aggression) enables us to understand the plurality of local/regional positions that become a source of confusion or uncertainty between civil victims and victims of the imperial army.

We can also include artistic production in these places of memory. This aspect can clearly not be overlooked when we see to what extent mass crimes have been a source of inspiration/fascination in graphic art, literature, poetry, cinema and theatre... The study of these works is even more interesting because the way they are received by their audience and critics transcribes current opinion, awakens our consciences, triggers or reactivates social debate and is therefore a wonderful sounding box for memory.

Judicial memory of massacre: trials

We will also focus on the important markers that are legal proceedings, which rekindle social debate whilst providing a sort of overview of a society's memory at a given time. When they converge with rising struggles, trials can help to draw out other memories such as, for example, the gender-based crimes of rape and abuse of comfort women in Asia which, after the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, led to the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo five years later. Finally, we will of course be looking at the question of reparation and what is usually a long process to reach it. Here is where generally lies the end of a long path to recognition of the facts by those who committed them, before resilience and reconciliation blot out memory of the crimes, rarely to the point of forgetting.

Temporary Scientific Committee

G. Eismann (UCN), S. Grimaldi (Mémorial), J-L Leleu (MRSH Caen), M. Lucken (INALCO), S.Martens (IHA), D. Peschanski (CNRS), F. Rouquet (UCN), J. Sémelin (CNRS), F. Virgili (CNRS), A. Wieviorka (CNRS)

Dates: 22, 23 and 24 November 2017

Venue: Mémorial de Caen (France)

The deadline for submission of papers is 30 March 2017
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Conditions for submission: priority will be given to historical research that provides new perspectives or fields of study. Proposals, in French or English, must be submitted as a **300-word abstract** and sent along with a single page CV to:

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