Collective Memory and Mass Violence

HIST / HGS 276/376

Spring 2010

Instructors: Thomas Kühne and Cristina Andriani
Time: Thursday, 2:50-5:50 pm (class time), 6-8 pm (movie time)
Place: Kent Seminar Room, Strassler Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
Office Hours: Tuesday 1:15-2:00 pm, Jefferson 316; Wednesday 12:00-1 pm Strassler Center, 2nd fl (Kühne); Thursday 8:30-9:30 am, Strassler Center 3rd fl (Andriani)
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Description

There is no present and no future without the past. This is true not least when it comes to mass violence: the way societies decide about whether to engage in war or even genocide depends on their collective experiences with mass violence in the past, and on which lessons they have drawn from these experiences. In the 1920 and 1930s, French public opinion favored pacifist ideologies; huge parts of the country had been devastated by trench warfare in World War I. France’s enemy, Germany, however, fostered revisionist and militarist visions and pursued from 1939 on, genocidal warfare on huge parts of an entire continent. Having suffered from complete devastation during World War II, most European societies have decisively refrained from warfare since 1945 and observed pacifist attitudes. The United States, widely untroubled by mass violence on its own territory since the late 19th century, has been less reluctant to resolve political conflicts violently.

This seminar examines how societies, nations, groups and individuals remember war, genocide, and terror. How is such memory fabricated, transmitted, and consumed? We will inquire into theories of, and approaches to, the concept of collective memory and apply them to major events of mass violence and political terror in the 20th century: World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War. The difference between war and genocide will deserve particular attention. Comparative explorations into various European regions, Israel, and the United States will structure the course throughout.

The course will explore a broad range of issues and mediums of collective memory: legal issues of justice and injustice as they materialize in national and international trials and in international conventions; emotional consequences of trauma, mourning, shame, and guilt; the negotiation of memory in memoirs and testimonies, mass media, memorials, monuments, museums, fictional literature and popular culture (e.g., cinema and TV); the
agency of survivors of genocides, war veterans, and second and third generations. These different dimensions of collective memory relate to different disciplines in the humanities and in the social and behavioral sciences. The course thus offers a chance to develop insights into interdisciplinary scholarship, that is, into the ways different disciplines approach the same topic.

Named the Higgins Seminar in the Humanities in 2010/11, this course will conclude on April 29 with a public symposium that allows the students to discuss their research with two internationally renowned experts in the field of Collective Memory and Mass Violence, Omer Bartov (Brown University) and Daniel Levy (SUNY Stony Brook).

Requirements

This course will be taught in the spirit of a tutorial: once you decided to take the class, you are expected to stick to it, come to the sessions and be well prepared.

In order to facilitate informed discussion, you are required to write a short paper of one or two pages, single spaced, in conjunction with the assigned books and essays to each session. The papers are due in class and must be handed in to the instructors at its end.

Each student takes minutes of one session and presents them at the beginning of the following session. The minutes summarize the contents of our discussion, its findings and controversies in a readable, well organized and non-partisan way. Please type them out and provide photocopies for the class.

Each student joins an expert group that prepares a poster presentation at the concluding symposium on April 29; drafts of these presentations will be discussed and are due on April 22. There will be four expert groups at the symposium:

1) Everlasting Trauma? First, Second, and Third Generation Survivors of the Holocaust in Israel
2) Victimhood: Suffering and National Identity in East and Central Europe
3) Vietnam War Memory and Holocaust Memory in America: a Comparison
4) Violent Pasts and the Diffusion of Human Rights – Aspirations and Limitations

The poster should give evidence of substantial thought and represent a concise summary of key points identified in literature on the expert topic in essay format. The poster would likely include an introduction, methods, analysis of literature, and a discussion. The decision about what to present is made jointly between students and faculty. At the symposium, each group should provide an overview of their findings, identify key issues of discussion and debate, and create a series of questions to guide an informal discussion on their expert topic. Posters may be printed through services offered by ITS.

Students may use work on poster presentation to jump start their final papers. Students are to submit an 8-12 page paper on topic of their choice. Please provide paper topic
choice by week 7 and one page abstract/outline by week 12. The final paper is due May 3. Papers should be double spaced, in Chicago style, with a minimum of 15 references.

Grading and Practical Arrangements

A maximum of 100 points can be achieved with
- 4 points for each short paper (40 in total). Only the ten best papers will count for your grade. Late papers cannot receive more than 2 points
- 10 points for the minutes (5 points for content, 5 points for organization)
- 10 points for continuous participation in class discussion
- 20 points for participation in the poster presentation
- 20 points for the final paper

You are supposed to attend class on a regularly basis. Absences without sufficient documentation will result in a deduction of three points each.

100-95 points=A, 94-90 points=A-, 89-85 points=B+, 84-80=B, 79-75 points=B-, etc.

All readings are to be completed on the day assigned, before you come to class. Please bring both the readings and the notes you take from the readings to class to be able to follow and participate in class discussions.

Apart from inquiring in the relation of collective memory and mass violence, this course serves to introduce students more generally to techniques of historical scholarship and practices of academic communication. It is of great importance to develop and strengthen skills of analyzing primary and secondary sources critically. The required readings are carefully chosen. However, none of them should be mistaken as comprising a final truth. Consider them as one of many options to look at a certain topic. Try to understand the basic assumptions, the main arguments, and the limitations of any text you read. Critique is the oil of knowledge. In class, you are invited to speak up and to articulate your thoughts and ideas, whether or not they comply with those of your classmates and the instructors.

Checking emails on a regular basis and staying connected with friends and the rest of the world is very important. Do not do it in class though. Laptops, cell phones, iPods, gameboys, DVD players and other electronic devices are inclined to distract you or others from class discussions. They are to be switched off during class.

Outline of the Syllabus

The books of Winter, Novick, Spiegelman, Douglas, Minow, Langer, Hass, and Young are available for purchase in the bookstore. All other texts are available electronically or will be provided as photocopies.
Week 1: Jan 21

**Introduction**

No reading.

Week 2: Jan 28

**Mourning**

**Reading:** Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning. The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Introduction, chapters 1 to 4 and 9; Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 3.

**Response paper** (1) on topic of your choice.

Week 3: Feb 4

**Politics**


**Response paper** (2): *Remembering WWI, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War – Different or the Same?* (Outline, based on the readings on of this and the previous week; bullet points allowed)

Week 4: Feb 11

**Comics**


**Response paper** (3): *Terror into Comics: Appalling or Amazing?*

Week 5: Feb 18

**Justice**


Week 6: Feb 25
Forgiveness


Response paper (5): Coping with Legacies of Violence -- Trials or Truth Commissions? (Use both the Douglas and Minow texts to back up your argument.)

Week 7: March 4
Testimony


Response paper (6) on topic of your choice.

Week 8: March 18
Trauma


Response paper (7): When the Personal Becomes Political -- identify some of the issues and problems with the development of trauma as a mental illness within the politics of war.
Week 9: March 25

**Gender**


Week 10: Apr 1

**Veterans**


Response paper (9) on topic of your choice.

Week 11: Apr 8

**Nations**


Response paper (10) on topic of your choice.
Week 12: Apr 15

**Cosmopolitanism**


**Response paper** (11): *Propelling Human Rights through Holocaust Memory?*

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Week 13: Apr 22

**Victimhood**


**Response paper** (12): three arguments with Omer Bartov.
Draft of poster presentations and outline of individual papers due. (Final version of paper due May 3.)

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Week 14: Apr 29

**Holocaust Memory – Legacies of Disaster or Lessons of Cosmopolitanism?**

Public symposium with Omer Bartov (Brown University), Daniel Levy (SUNY Stony Brook) and the students of the seminar *Collective Memory and Mass Violence*, sponsored by the Higgins School for the Humanities.