

29 APRIL 2010

The colloquium *Holocaust Memory: Legacies of Disaster or Lessons of Cosmopolitanism?* held on 29 April 2010 was the culmination of a seminar on collective memory and mass violence. Selected as the Higgins seminar for the best interdisciplinary course of the year, the syllabus covered theories of collective memory, the impact of trauma on memory, and the various ways in which collective memory is constructed, transformed, and manipulated. Co-taught by Professor Thomas Kühne and Cristina Andriani, Weil Fellow in the Psychology of Genocide, the course intertwined psychology and history to explore collective memories of World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, and the Vietnam War. The colloquium posed questions about Holocaust memory: Is it possible to learn the “right” lessons from the Holocaust? Is there any hope that “Never Again” will become something more than an empty phrase?

Professors Daniel Levy of the State University of New York, Stony Brook and Omer Bartov of Brown University were the featured scholars. They discussed their opposing views on whether Holocaust memory can transform present and future understandings of mass violence and human rights. Levy approached the topic from his discipline of sociology and argued for cosmopolitanism—in his view, globalization universalizes collective memories, which are absorbed by nations and placed beside their own nationalist composition of these same memories. Thus, collective memories are both local and global and can be utilized to develop human rights. Bartov rebutted Levy’s argument with a less optimistic perspective. He challenged historians to undertake localized research projects to uncover the nuances of past violence in remote areas that remain unexplored. He posited that rather than allowing memory to become universal, thereby losing depth and detail, scholars have a responsibility to discover what really happened in the Holocaust, which may (or may not) lead to the establishment of universal human rights.

Seminar students worked in teams to address key issues of collective memory and they presented their ideas in posters at the colloquium. They discussed how

nations, societies, groups, and individuals remember war and genocide. Topics included genocide education in high school, the portrayal of Nazi perpetrators in popular media, transgenerational transmission of trauma in second and third generation survivors of the Holocaust, and a comparison of victimhood and memorialization in Ukraine and Poland.

Well attended by graduate and undergraduate students, as well as faculty from a number of departments—psychology, Jewish studies, and history among them—the colloquium, like the course, was truly interdisciplinary. The debate between Levy and Bartov led to an animated discussion on whether it is more important to examine what is remembered or forgotten than how it is remembered or forgotten. The discussion ranged from memory construction, to its impact on human rights, to the inaction and action of various countries under the guise of human rights. Harvard Professor Jens Meierhenrich, the Center’s Cathy Cohen Lasry Visiting Professor, emphasized the importance of understanding the purpose and construction of human rights documents within the context of the memory of Holocaust atrocities. Were countries acting or not acting out of political-self interest with regard to human rights or in the name of cosmopolitan memory? Ultimately the colloquium served to prompt thoughtful analysis and discussion rather than answer questions. As Psychology Professor Johanna Vollhardt noted, “An impressive range of topics. Every part of the colloquium raised questions.” In sum, the symposium was a great success in raising significant issues which many Center graduate students will tackle in a host of dissertation topics that address the formation of Holocaust memory. —*Cristina Andriani*

HOLOCAUST MEMORY: LEGACIES OF DISASTER OR LESSONS OF COSMOPOLITANISM?

Weil Fellow Christina Andriani, Professors Omer Bartov, Brown University, Daniel Levy, State University of New York, Stony Brook, and Thomas Kühne, Clark University.

