

The Politics of Memory: Victimization, Violence and Contested Narratives of the Past

Fifth Annual Conference of the Historical Dialogues, Justice, and Memory Network
Columbia University, New York,
December 3-5, 2015

In recent years, societies have begun to pay greater attention to gross violation of human rights and mass crimes in their pasts, especially but not exclusively, when moving from an authoritarian state to a democracy, or emerging from a violent conflict like civil war. There are yet other societies that have begun to use historical dialogue to address injustices of the distant past, sometimes even centuries ago. Do societies with heightened awareness of their violent historical legacy have a stronger civic democratic identity? Are they less prone to propaganda that might cause a new cycle of violence? Papers are invited that explore the relationship between historical dialogue and conflict resolution. Researchers, scholars and practitioners are invited to present papers on topics related to historical dialogue that explore mechanisms for fostering shared work between interlocutors of two or more sides of a conflict; for identifying and monitoring how history is misused to divide society and perpetuate conflict; for enhancing public discussion about reconciling the past.

To this end, this conference aims to explore in particular issues relating to memory, victimhood and violence. Possible themes include the changing nature and identity of victims and the theme of contested victimization, with a particular interest in topics that explore the anniversaries of historical violence and the way such events are remembered. Thus, for example, 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide; the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the first Nuremberg trial and the Tokyo tribunal; the 50th anniversary of mass violence in Indonesia; the 20th anniversary of Srebrenica. Papers are invited that reflect on how these events are being remembered, on the evolution and politics of these memories.

Other themes include papers that examine ways in which the status of victimization provides a rationale for violence, or, conversely cases in which victimization leads to reconciliation. Papers that focus on a historiography of what constitutes victimization—from the shame of victimhood to victimization as empowering are also welcome. Also welcome is work on victims of political violence, and histories of contested victimization. Finally, papers are invited that explore the theoretical and empirical relationship between memory (individual, societal or international) and historical dialogue, with a particular focus on the issue of the efficacy of justice, accountability and reconciliation mechanisms.

The Historical Dialogues, Justice, and Memory Network (www.historicaldialogues.org) is coordinated by an international Steering Committee and the Alliance for Historical Dialogue and Accountability (AHDA), at the Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR).