



## Memory and Religion. Central and Eastern Europe in a Global Perspective

### 8th Genealogies of Memory international conference

16-18 October 2018, Warsaw

#### Conference report

“Religion is expected by many in our society to be in charge of the past.” With this idea Prof. Alexander Agadjanian (Russian State University for the Humanities, Russia) opened his keynote lecture on the first day of the 8<sup>th</sup> Genealogies of Memory Conference, organised by the European Network of Solidarity and Remembrance (ENRS) and Institute for East European Studies of Freie Universität Berlin. This year’s edition was entitled “Memory and Religion: Central and Eastern Europe in a Global Perspective”. The conference consisted of three days of speeches and discussions as well as in-depth criticism of different theoretical concepts and framings, characterized by a general tendency to modernization and secularization. Apart from presentations of individual papers, the programme included a round table on the role of memory with representatives of different religions as well as two film-screenings which showed the influence of traumatic past on the local identity and heritage. There was also a final discussion which served as a means to summarize and conclude the whole event. The conference took place in the Library of the University of Warsaw between 16 and 18 October 2018 and gathered 121 scholars from all over the world, with a majority coming from Central and Eastern Europe.

Prof. Jan Rydel (ENRS) and Dr Małgorzata Pakier (ENRS) opened the conference and introduced the two convenors, Dr Zuzanna Bogumił (The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Warsaw) and Dr Yuliya Yurchuk (Södertörn University, Sweden). Dr Bogumił and Dr Yurchuk emphasized the relation between religious and secular systems and how they influence each other, especially within the memory landscape.

After a brief introduction on the main topics of the conference, Prof. Agadjanian gave his keynote lecture. According to him, the official and vernacular memory are more often in contradiction than in symphony, as the past “is a huge world of colonization” and so grounds for competition between different stakeholders. Prof. Agadjanian also pointed out what he sees as the most important narratives of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the narrative of triumph and the narrative of trauma. Using examples from contemporary Russia, he showed how these two discursive motives may become intertwined with each other, how they develop and change. Furthermore, he indicated the inevitability to react to the atrocities of the last century from a religious point of view and thus the subsequent reflections on human nature or the representation of God.

The keynote lecture was followed with the first panel “Religious Dimensions of Centenaries Commemorations” with Dr Sofia Tchouikina (Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique, Paris) and Dr Tatiana Voronina (University of Zurich), as well as Prof. Marcin Napiórkowski (Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw) as moderator and Prof. Piotr Kwiatkowski (University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw) as commentator. Dr Tchouikina discussed the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the commemoration of the centenary of First World War in 2014 in Russia. She presented the new interpretation of the war previously forgotten in the Russian collective memory,

which emerged in order to legitimise current political decisions, sacralise the public sphere and take control of memorials or exhibitions. She also highlighted the use of “quasi-religious” language by public historians and associations as well as the presence of religious symbols without historical contextualization in museums. The second panellist, Dr Tatiana Voronina, also focused on the Russian Orthodox Church and its position and the political influence during the commemoration of the Russian Revolutions of 1917 and the memory of the Great Terror 1937-1938. As was the case with the previous speaker, Dr Voronina stressed the public reinterpretation of these events, its nationalist purpose as well as the intention to explain the religiosity of the Russian people by referring to their values.

The second panel called “New Martyrs and Politics of Memory” included papers by Prof. George Enache (Dunarea de Jos University of Galați), Dr Katarzyna Korzeniewska (Polish Institute of International Affairs), Prof. Olga Khristoforova (Russian State University for the Humanities, Moscow) and Dr Momchil Metodiev (Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”). Dr Marta Łukaszewicz (University of Warsaw) moderated and Dr Agata Šústová Drelová (Slovak Academy of Sciences) was the commentator. Prof. George Enache opened the panel by talking about the canonisation of the Martyrs of the Romanian Orthodox Church during the Communist Period. He stated that the Romanian Orthodoxy has not had a canonisation “policy” and that no canonisation occurred until 1950. He explained the ambiguity of the Orthodox Church in Romania, which oscillated between being a victim and acting as a collaborator, and its influence on the idea of martyrdom during the communist period. The second panellist, Dr Katarzyna Korzeniewska showed how visions of the “National Saints” in Lithuania underwent a transformation during the period 1980-2017, from referring mostly to the past icon of St Casimir, a Lithuanian hero and patron who defended the values of freedom and independence, a religious figure that was secularized, to the “new martyrdom” of priests who were imprisoned during communism and were considered to be martyrs for “God and the Fatherland”. She stressed that it was the suffering which served as the national value of Lithuania after the communism period. The third panellist, Prof. Olga Khristoforova talked about Soviet Symbols in the Old Believer’s Memory. She discussed the case of a group of Eastern Orthodox Christians who emigrated to the historic region of *Verkhokamie* in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and which during the communist times tried hard to keep their traditions intact, while also being influenced by the official remembrance practices and political circumstances. Finally, Dr Momchil Metodiev closed the session with, according to him, a rather politicised topic: canonisation of the new Martyrs of the Orthodox Church in Bulgaria after the opening of the Communist State Security Archives. He stressed that the church as an institution cannot be named neither a victim nor a collaborator. Instead, a case of each priest has to be analysed person by person.

The day ended with a round table discussion with representatives of different faiths active in the field of remembrance. Firstly, Pastor Thomas Jeutner (Evangelical Reconciliation Parish/ Chapel of Reconciliation, Berlin) started the discussion by explaining the role of the Chapel of Reconciliation. The temple is located at the Bernauer Strasse in Berlin, a street known because of having the Berlin Wall run right across it. Pastor Jeutner highlighted the efforts of his community to commemorate the communist victims while at the same time “bridging the gaps of the present”. The Archpriest Kirill Kaleda (Church of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia, Butovo) presented the memorialisation of the mass executions in Butovo, a district located in the south of Moscow which was seized by the Soviets after the Revolution. A large number of these victims were clergymen. He referred to several memorials and mentioned a plan to also build a museum to commemorate the victims. Thirdly, Catholic priest Prof. Piotr Mazurkiewicz (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) gave a speech about the role of Catholicism and Christian values in Poland as well as the efforts of the Polish Catholic Church towards forgiveness and reconciliation. He explained the diplomatic role of the church in relation to other countries such as Germany or Ukraine. The next speaker was Sufi Andrzej Saramowicz (Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī Sufi Polish Foundation) who put emphasis on the

positive role of remembrance, the memory of God, but also forgetting within Islam. He warned about the negative vicious circle of “vendetta” (revenge) within collective memory. Finally, Rabbi Yehoshua Ellis (Shavei Israel in Katowice) discussed the difficulties of the Jewish Community in Poland to do research on and commemorate the mass graves from the Second World War. As the Jewish religious law does not let to move the body from where it originally was buried, excavations are not possible. Moreover, bureaucracy of local governments regarding memorial policy often indivertibly impedes such initiatives. Last but not least, lack of Jewish population in given areas makes active commemoration and caring for the mass graves more demanding.

The second day started with the keynote speech by Prof. Geneviève Zubrzycki (University of Michigan). In her lecture, Prof. Zubrzycki urged for breaking associations between religion and the sacred as well as between the secular and the profane. She referred to sacralization of national events or symbols such as the flag and, on the other hand, the loss of religious meaning of some “holy days” such as Christmas. She also emphasized the use of religious, especially Christian, language in Poland to express opposition and rebellion against Communism – a phenomena with diverse layers of different narratives which accumulated generation after generation. “Symbols’ meaning and mobilizing power is also derived from the *historical narratives* they evoke and the *collective memories* rituals around them [which they] come to embody” – she stated. She discussed several case-studies, including the “Crosses of Auschwitz”, an example well-known thanks to her book under the same title.

After the lecture, the first panel of the day was “Secular vs Sacred: The Uses of Religious Language in Secular Memory Projects” with Prof. Rasa Balockaite (Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas), Prof. Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (University of Warsaw), Dr Brendan Humphreys (University of Helsinki), Ekaterina V. Klimenko (Maria Grzegorzewska University & Polish Academy of Sciences), as well as Dr Yuliya Yurchuk as the moderator and Prof. Andrzej Szpociński (Polish Academy of Sciences) as the commentator. Prof. Rasa Balockaite started with her paper about the expression of national suffering through a Catholic discourse in Lithuania. She argued that the Catholic narrative of suffering and redemption was suitable to express and interpret historical traumas during the Second World War and the Communist period. To illustrate her claim, she analyzed several Lithuanian national memorials which consist of Christian crosses or make use of other religious symbols. Prof. Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper, on the other hand, presented three case-studies of martyrdom from local Polish communities in order to explain the predomination of religious symbols in Polish memorial projects and to further develop on the links between the sacred and the secular language. The third speaker, Dr Brendan Humphreys contrasted several personality cults, including those of Stalin, Hoxha and Ceaușescu. He sought to undermine the often false dichotomy between the sacred and the profane and show how some expressions are “religious in form, secular in content”. The last panelist was Ekaterina V. Klimenko, who explained the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on the memory and commemoration of the Bolshevik Revolution, using the exhibition originally entitled “Orthodox Rus’. My History” and eventually renamed “Russia. My History.” as a case study.

“The Sacred in Post-Conflict Memories” was the title of the second panel of the second day. The panelists included Dr Elmira Muratova (Crimean Federal University, Simferopol), Prof. Lap Yan Kung (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Prof. Jie-Hyun Lim (Sogang University, Seoul), as well as Dr Julianne Funk (University of Zurich) and Dr Ioannis Armakolas (University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki). Dr Elina Kahla (University of Helsinki) moderated and Dr Stella Rock (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam) was the commentator. First to take the floor was Dr Elmira Muratova, who discussed the role of Islam as a unifying power for the Crimean Tatars in the post-Soviet Era, especially in the context of the trauma of deportations during the Second World War. Then the focus moved from Crimea to China. In his speech, Prof. Lap Yan Kung explained the state prohibition of public mourning of the Tiananmen Square protests. He introduced three different ways of dealing with death in China from a Daoist, New Confucianism and Chinese Christian perspective. After Prof. Yan Kung, Prof. Jie-

Hyun Lim explained the case of the Polish Franciscan Maksymilian Kolbe and his memory as an Auschwitz Martyr, as well as his connection to the Nagai Takashi Memorial, one of the symbols of Nagasaki *hibakusha* (survivors of the atomic bomb). Prof. Lim stressed which facts of Kolbe's life were emphasized and which were left out in order to justify a specific image of him as a Martyr. The last panelists were Dr Julianne Funk and Dr Ioannis Armakolas who in their research focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dr Funk and Dr Armakolas explained how religion – “the main identifier in the country” – plays an important role in remembering the Massacre of Srebrenica and the healing process after the war. They showed the recently built cemetery in Srebrenica/Potočari as well as the public memorial of 11 July, the commemorative day observed on the anniversary of the beginning of the massacre. Dr Funk and Dr Armakolas pointed out some of the controversial topics such as responsibility for the genocide, politicization of the memorials or the way in which trauma is being dealt with within contemporary society.

The day ended with a screening of two movies showing the influence of traumatic past on local identity and heritage. The first film, “Islands of Memory: Memory and Religion in Russia's Far North” by Dr Pawas Bisht (Keele University, UK) and Dr Alena Pfoser (Loughborough University, UK) showed a touristic visit to the Solovetsky Monastery, located on the Solovetsky Islands in northern Russia. The site was turned into one of the first prisons and forced-labor camps of the gulag after the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. The film presents different layers of history in this area and how the mass graves are commemorated. The second film was „Not to Judge!” by Dr Magdalena Lubańska (University of Warsaw), which deals with the “haunted or contaminated landscape” of the town of Przeworsk, located in the South-Eastern Poland in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship. The film shows rehearsals and the final performance of a religious play based on the Passion of Christ. The play is used by Dr Lubańska as a starting point to address the tragic events of the past which took place near Przeworsk, such as the killings of Poles and Jews during and after the Second World War, as well as the present conflicts in remembering them. Dr Matilda Mroz (University of Sussex) acted both the commentator and moderator of this panel.

The third day of the 8<sup>th</sup> Genealogies of Memory Conference started with a panel discussion: “Transitional Justice, Memory Laws and Wars” with Dr Patryk Wawrzyński (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń), Dr Nadia Zasanska (Ukrainian Catholic University, Lviv) and Tomasz Wiśniewski (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań). Dr Simon Lewis (University of Potsdam) moderated and Dr Oksana Myshlovska (The Graduate Institute, Geneva) was the commentator. The first panelist, Dr Patryk Wawrzyński, presented his paper about the role of “the Rainbow People”, the Christians of Ubuntu in South Africa. He highlighted the importance of this group in fostering reconciliation and forgiveness after the Apartheid System. The second speaker, Dr Nadia Zasanska addressed the characteristics of religious narratives of the Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities in the Donbas conflict in Ukraine in 2014. She focused on the language used in the media and therefore offered a lexical-semantic approach. Finally, Tomasz Wiśniewski presented his paper on postsecular struggles for epistemic justice about definitions of epistemic justice, injustice and violence.

The last panel with individual presentations focused on vernacular memory practices. Speakers included Dr Karina Jarzyńska (Jagiellonian University, Kraków), Naum Trajanovski (Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Advanced Studies Koszeg), Vera Herold (The Lisbon Consortium – Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon), Dr Alla Marchenko (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw), as well as Dr Julia Buyskykh (Centre for Applied Anthropology, Kyiv) as the moderator and Dr Maciej Krzywosz (University of Białystok) as the commentator. The panel began with Dr Karina Jarzyńska presenting three case studies in Poland. She presented her research in Radechnica, Chodówki and Borzęcin regarding the use of religion to commemorate “unmemorialized” genocide sites and dialogue that these forms of commemoration create with the inhabitants of the area. Next, Naum Trajanovski explained the increasing attention given to the contemporary commemorations of the controversial

figure of Mara Buneva and their role in Macedonian history and nationalism. The third panelist was Vera Herold, who spoke about the German War Memorial in the Protestant Church in Lisbon during the interwar period, stressing its modifications as well as different narratives about the memorial, depending on the historical moment. The last presentation of the conference was given by Dr Alla Marchenko. She discussed the Hasidic pilgrimages to the grave of Rabbi Nachman in Uman in Ukraine. She also explained the “interaction of memories” in the public space not only in the context of different religious collectives but also of official commemorations which take place in this city today.

The 2018 edition of the Genealogies of Memory Conference focused on memory and religion was concluded with a round table discussion with the following academics: Dr Michał Łuczewski (Centre for the Thought of John Paul II, Warsaw), Prof. Paweł Śpiewak (Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw), Prof. Grace Davie (University of Exeter) and Prof. Kathy Rousselet (Center for International Studies, Sciences Po, Paris), moderated by the conference convenors, Dr Zuzanna Bogumił and Dr Yuliya Yurchuk. Prof. Grace Davie pointed out the telling lack of a paper on education, which is always politicized and related to memory. She also stressed the necessity of keeping memory alive as well as the importance of knowing which institutions are interested in maintaining it. Meanwhile, Prof. Kathy Rousselet highlighted the processes of reinvention and institutionalization of tradition. She also mentioned the importance of mothers of victims and their associations, for instance in Bosnia or China, to keep the memory of tragedies alive. “Memory is more about the present than about the past” – she affirmed. In turn, Dr Michał Łuczewski spoke about memory and the process of making identity primordial and turning it into an agent with a moral status. Finally, Prof. Paweł Śpiewak explained the importance of experiencing memory and remembering in Judaism. He also stated that memory needs myths and legends and that these are created by religious people.

*All presentations as well as the commentaries and discussions will be available shortly on the webpage of the organiser, European Network Remembrance and Solidarity: [www.enrs.eu](http://www.enrs.eu).*

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