

Commemoration: Contexts and Concepts

September 3rd & 4th 2015 @ University College Cork

Across the island of Ireland, we have entered a ten-year period during which the centenaries of the foundational events of our states and societies will take place. These events reflect inter-group conflict between divergent nationalisms, major ideological shifts and fratricidal ideological conflict, the establishment of institutions that enshrined the power balance between different groups and official ideologies, and marked the shifting balance of power between labour and capital, and a shifting relationship between women and the state. These furthermore took place in the broader context of the First World War which brought to an end the 'long 19th Century' of relative peace and optimism and ushered in the 'short 20th Century' as an 'age of extremes'. These are all events whose impact is still 'too early' to determine and which demand careful reflection, as well as reflection on *how* society reflects *on* them through commemorative practices.

While the conference is about commemoration, our focus is not only on Ireland, and not simply 'historical', nor about 'the past'. Rather our concern is about how the past plays itself out in the present, and how past & present recur into the future. If "imagination is working over the remembered" as James Joyce says, we are interested also in what one might call 'memories of the future'. We are interested in how recent historical events -the Peace Process, the corruption Tribunals, scandals in the Church and other institutions, the boom, the 2008 crash, the Troika, Austerity and so on, resonate with previous histories & memories, in Ireland, in Greece, in Spain, throughout the EU and elsewhere; how recent events are forgotten so quickly, how they may be remembered, and how their being remembered may shape our imaginings and recollections in the future.



Conference Organisers:

Dr John O'Brien, *Waterford IT.*

Dr Lorcan Byrne, *UCC & Respond! College.*

Dr Kieran Keohane, *UCC.*

email: CommemorationUCC@gmail.com

Phone: 00 353 (0) 86 381 9001

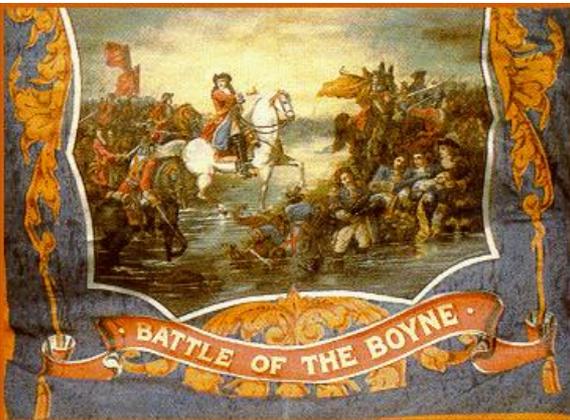


This conference will address both 'contexts', meaning rich historical studies and thick descriptions of the meaning and significance of these events, then studies of the contemporary means of commemorating them. We are also addressing 'concepts', meaning deep theorisation of these substantive topics. We have presently been referring to the work of authors such as Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory, René Girard on sacrificial foundations, Paul Connerton on how societies remember and forget, Paul Ricoeur on narrative, history and memory and Bernhard Giesen on dealing with historical traumas.



The conference is organised under the auspices of 'The President of Ireland's Ethics Initiative', and so one of our central concerns is ethical remembrance / the ethics of memory / remembering ethics, "for it is through remembering consciously and ethically that we acquire the potential to gain release from past wrongs and acquire also the resolution to anticipate revivals of hate and exclusion" (President Michael D. Higgins, 2015).

Rituals and practices of commemoration are important as they are a source of ethics, shape collective identity and foster solidarity, create traditions, give meaning through providing a sense of where we have come from and where we are going, they articulate the material interests of group members and facilitate collective action, they represent a way of processing traumatic events of the past, and are potentially a means of defusing conflict through dealing with shame and anger over past actions. Such rituals and practices are particularly important in the context of our current age of permanent presentness and permanent change (Bauman 1999), based on an anomic, post-traditional culture, driven by the expansion of mediated experiences and rapid change, in which ethical memory has become clouded.



Invited Participants Include:

Raffaella Baccolini, University of Bologna.

Seán Hillen, Artist.

Bernhard Geisen, University of Konstanz.

Michael Cronin, Dublin City University.

Bjorn Thomassen, Roskilde University.

Arpad Szakolczai, University College Cork.

Kieran Bonner, University of Waterloo.



We invite papers, contributions, interventions and thought-pieces from all fields and practices in the arts, humanities and social science that reflect on how our society has been shaped by the past, and how our means of commemorating the past shapes our present and future society.

Abstracts to CommemorationUCC@gmail.com
by May 31st 2015.