

CFP Edited book at a University Press  
Deadline for abstract submission: December 7, 2021

## **Unlocked memory: Did the Covid pandemic change Commemorations?**

### **Editors**

Sarah Gensburger, Full Research Professor in Political Science at the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS)

Orli Fridman, Faculty of Media and Communications (FMK), Belgrade & School for International Training (SIT)

### **Brief description**

It was in the spring of 2020 when many countries around the world went into lockdown as a respond to the spreading of the COVID-19 virus. Many people will remember this lockdown period as a time of endless digital activities and interactions. Since then, the world has gone online, from elementary and high school classrooms, academic courses and conferences to professional meetings, doctors' appointments, mindfulness support groups, and family events. Commemorative events have also gone online, both those sponsored by state institutions and alternative ones. In light of the 'connective turn' that predated the pandemic, that is the sudden abundance, pervasiveness, and immediacy of digital media (Hoskins, 2018), our aim is to document and make sense of the growing presence of online memorialization during the COVID-19 crisis. In doing so, we seek to trace and pay close attention both to the transformation of the commemoration of historical events -- from Slavery to the Holocaust, from colonization and national military events, to post-conflict local/communal alternative commemorative events, as well as to the implementation of a transnational and unprecedented dynamics of immediate memorialization and heritagization of the Covid itself as a "historical event" still ongoing.

As it was impossible for people to gather for annual commemorations, activists as well as state officials began to engage with novel mnemonic practices, utilizing online technology. While some commemorations employed existing mnemonic rituals, others have pushed activists and local actors to explore innovative ones. Social distancing during the quarantine periods and the limits it created for public gathering turned out to be an unexpected opportunity for the development of alternative commemorations while the "historical situation" itself lead to a new memory boom, making of immediate memorialization a social imperative. As it appears, the Covid pandemic transformed commemoration by blurring more than ever the frontier between civil society and state actors in terms of remembrance activities. While the sanitary situation limited social interactions, at the same time it unlocked memory, creating on one hand a new memory boom via the collection of immediate and grassroots souvenirs, generating new forms of memory activism

and empowering already existing actors as memory activists and on the other hand, in some cases leading state actors to implement new initiatives.

How can we make sense of this paradox? What does it mean for the study of the relationship between memory, democratization and power? What does it mean for the study of commemorations and commemorative practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? To what extent the multiplication of the toppling down of statues and monuments in the aftermath of the lockdown periods can be seen as a citizens (re)appropriation of the mnemonic public space? Did the corona crises really lead commemoration to change from an ontological and political point of view? While the lockdown created unprecedented opportunities for counter-memory activists and gave birth to a call for ordinary and everyday memories of the pandemic, did it lead this memory dynamics towards emancipation from the reproduction of social and spatial inequalities? How can we understand the reasons for the Covid memory boom and what have been its limits? Studying memory through lockdown should enable us to think through the social function of memorialization in neoliberal societies, both as a tool of political emancipation and as a mean for political control.

This volume will propose a number of questions to engage with: What happened to commemorative practices and rituals, around the world, during the pandemic and especially during the lockdown periods? How did remembrance during the pandemic changed/shaped/reshaped/transformed commemorative actions and claims from below? Or those organized by state institutions? what will remembering the COVID-19 pandemic will actually entail and mean?

Crossing sociology, political science, history, anthropology and cultural and media studies, this book will address, but will not be limited to, the following questions:

- Public space, commemoration and COVID
- Learning from the past and the pandemic
- Collaborative memorialization
- Memory activism, alternative commemorations and digitalization
- State administration and commemoration
- Collective memory of Covid
- Vernacular memories and social inequalities

## **The editors**

**Sarah Gensburger** is a Full Professor of Political Science, Sociology and History at the French National Center of Scientific Research and deputy director of the Institute for Social Sciences of Politics at Paris Nanterre University/ENS Paris Saclay. She is the elected President of the Memory Studies Association (2021-2024). She is the author of nine books, including *Beyond Memory. Can we really learn from the past?* (Palgrave, 2020, translated to Arabic in Beyrouth, Dar-Alfarabi 2020, with S. Lefranc), *Memory on my doorstep. Chronicles of the Bataclan Neighborhood* (Paris,

2015-2016) (Leuven University Press, 2019) and *National Policy, Global Memory. The Commemoration of the Righteous among the Nations from Jerusalem to Paris* (Berghahn Books, 2016). She has written about the intersection of public policy, memory and social coexistence. She is also a curator and a podcast creator.

**Orli Fridman** is an associate professor at the Faculty of Media and Communications (FMK), Singidunum University and the academic director of the School for International Training (SIT) learning center in Belgrade. Her recent publications include: *Memory Activism and Digital Memory Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories* (Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming 2022); ‘Online Transnational Memory Activism and Commemoration: The Case of the White Armband Day’ in *Agency in Transnational Memory Politics* (Berghahn Books, 2020, with Katarina Ristić); ‘Conflict, Memory, and Memory Activism: Dealing with Difficult Pasts’ in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); ‘Peace formation from below: The “mirëdita, dobardan!” festival as an alternative to everyday nationalism’ (*Nations and Nationalism*, 2020).

\*\*\*

### **Call for Papers**

We invite scholars who engage with these questions to submit their proposals to include an abstract (250 words max), which must include a clear presentation of the proposed text including well defined methodology, a short resume of 10 lines maximum, following the format of the editors’ above. We are particularly interested in texts based on research conducted on commemorative events, that have taken place in the spring and summer of 2020 capturing both the creation of the memorialization of the lockdown period itself, as well as official and alternative commemorations and memory activism during the early months of the pandemic lockdown.

The abstracts and resumes should be sent, by **December 7, 2021**, to [sarah.gensburger@cnrs.fr](mailto:sarah.gensburger@cnrs.fr) and to [orli.fridman@fmk.edu.rs](mailto:orli.fridman@fmk.edu.rs) The selection will be made by December 22, 2021 and the text (between 7000 and 9000 words long) will be due by **May 15, 2022**.