For a connected and transnational history of purges in Europe in the wake of the Second World War

Université Rennes 2
11 et 12 juin 2015

Colloque organisé par
le Centre de Recherches historiques de l’Ouest (CERHIO- UMR CNRS 6258)

en partenariat avec
l'ENS Ulm, Paris, IHMC
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
l'UCL, Louvain-la-Neuve, CHDJ-FNRS
(PAI 7/22 Justice et populations)

Call for papers

The end of hostilities and the ideological defeat of fascist regimes is a clearly identifiable sequence on the Continental Europe's scale. According to John Horne, this “1945 moment” was marked by a “thirst for justice” towards the former enemies and their collaborators. Therefore, May 1945 did not mark an immediate or long-lasting return to peace, as is testified to by Tim Snyder's or Keith Lowe's recent works which present a convulsive history of the continent. In this sense, the conference deals with the meaning of “the end of the war”, an issue which is all the more important as adherence to the established regimes and/or the collaboration with the occupants was a phenomenon of unprecedented proportions in Europe during the Second World War, which required the implementation of justice policies (purges, Säuberung, denazification, Retribution, Zuivering…). Without eluding the diversity or even the plurality of situations caused by the war or end-of-war conditions, the project also postulates the unity of the necessity to carry out purges. It thereby contemplates the purge as a form of “generational situation” [Karl Mannheim] at the scale of many European societies.
It is precisely this shared experience, although not completely common, which is the foundation of our analysis, based on a historiography which is both dense at national level and incomplete at transnational scale.

Indeed, as a result of the frequent subdivision of national historiographies, very few compared, crossed and a fortiori transnational approaches to the phenomenon actually exist. The ambition of this conference is two-fold: 1./ Establish connections between numerous research works that already exist but are not put into perspective, 2./ Contribute to writing a connected history of purges at the European scale. To be consistent with this approach, whereas Western European countries are often the most studied/well-known, a particular attention will be given to “Central Europe”, Eastern Europe and Balkan Europe.

The objective is to favour a connected history which takes into account the exchanges, circulations and transfers of ideas, the reproduction of external models or foreign examples that lead to opposite policies. Likewise, a particular attention will be given to hybrid or mixed research topics that postulate intermediary approaches and reveal “intertwined” stakeholders or spheres. In this sense, we will focus on connection and meeting places or circles. To this end:

The first day of the conference will deal with the concepts and mechanisms related to purges at work in Europe by putting the emphasis on circulations and transfers.

The expected reflection axes will include:

1./ “incubation” sites during the conflict: that is to say places where (a) national purge(s) have been considered and sometimes prepared: London, Cairo, Moscow... The war resulted in a blurry European map of States and decision-making bodies as some governments or resistance movements representatives were in exile. Therefore, some towns embodied many different “little nations” where the post-war period was prepared, which did not prevent exchanges between the representatives of different countries. The conference, which will favour a multipolar approach, aims at shedding light on the transnational dynamics at work in these towns in a context marked by different liberation conditions and chronologies, but also by a will to cross specific national stakes and shared concerns at continental scale (restore order and legality with a double function of regulation and legitimisation).

2./ Used categories and incriminations: definitions, circulations, exchanges. For instance: the notion of war criminal as an “international” category, death penalty, national indignity, ...

3./ Relations and/or filiations between post-war purges and preceding purges but also concurrent purges in the early days of the Cold War.

4./ Influential people as a mediation and transmission method for purge policies or practices from one country to another.
The second day of the conference will focus on the topic of the exile and/or the “conversion” of the purged people: locations, circles, networks.

The expected reflection axes will include:

1./ Exile: mutual assistance networks and circles, “exopolitie”. The history of “exiled populations” is by definition a history of shared movements and paths. It can lead to focus the research on exiles/refugees, but also on the host circles and mutual assistance circles of collaborators in third countries. For instance, the role of churches, which has often been underlined, would deserve to be clarified. This research field is all the more transnational as it opens the path to the exopolitie [Stéphane Dufoix], in some cases with the reconstruction of pro-purged political spheres in the host countries, which served an admitted or even claimed anticommunism.

2./ The case of populations or social groups who were “targeted” or punished as collaborators. This issue can be crossed with that of German minorities or Volksdeutsche who were considered inherently guilty. The same goes for national groups in “Central”, Eastern or Balkan Europe.

3./ Certain locations and circles where compromised individuals could “convert” or redeem themselves would deserve a particular attention. The most classic or well-known examples that come to mind are intelligence or police services, mostly related to political circles, some economic circles, universities or the military.

Paper proposals (maximum 1 page long in French or English) with a short CV need to be sent to marc.bergere@uhb.fr before January, 15th 2015.

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