

DERVI International conference

INCESTUOUS VIOLENCE, TODAY AND YESTERDAY: BETWEEN CONCEALMENT AND DISCLOSURE

February 4-6, 2021, Paris

CALL FOR PAPERS

The human and social sciences, particularly nineteenth and twentieth century anthropology, have established incest as a foundational taboo of all human societies (Durkheim; Lévi-Strauss). This led to us considering it as a cultural invariant, stripped of historicity. Judged in collective representations as unthinkable and unspeakable, it has also been assimilated to the monstrous, an extraordinary anomaly. Prohibited and thus considered to be nonexistent (Dussy), unspeakable and therefore impervious to any assessment of its reality, incest can be neither the subject of public debate nor understood in the ordinary fabric of everyday life.

Today (and increasingly over the past twenty years), this incestuous paradigm seems to have shattered: denounced as an “absolute evil,” sexual violence against children, including incest, is omnipresent in the public arena, with successive prevention campaigns organized by public authorities, criminal cases involving incest making headlines, victims’ testimonies being published in the media (press, television, websites) and other narrative forms (cinema, literature, comic books), while surveys are conducted on the prevalence of incest (IPSOS/AIVI, 2010).

The objective of this conference, organized as part of the research program ANR DERVI (Dire, Entendre, Restituer les Violences Incestueuses—Telling, Hearing and Reporting Incestuous Violence) by anthropologists and historians, is to study this transformation, its epistemological and disciplinary issues, as well as its multiple underlying factors. This involves understanding, from a transdisciplinary and trans-era perspective, the complexity of the incestuous act, which can be understood as ordinary violence repeated in a familiar, even everyday context, despite its apparently unanimous collective condemnation.

For the past thirty or so years, the silence surrounding incest has been underscored in

innumerable studies from various disciplinary fields (psychoanalysis, history, anthropology, gender studies), this conference will focus attention on the disclosure of incest and the key moment of its unveiling, at different scales (families, institutional networks, media), in contexts (family, judicial, administrative, media, literary), according to procedures (revelation, denunciation, testimony, reporting, detection, narratives, “business”), and with variable repercussions (indignation, indifference, denial, scandal). Who said or showed what? When did it begin? Who heard what? Who reported it? What are the modalities of revealing incest? How is it received?

Papers will focus on the representations and signification of incest according to the identity of those confronted with it, according to their position in the family (father, mother, brother, sister, cousins, aunt, uncle, etc.), according to the situation and place of each person involved: abusers, victims, relatives, witnesses, social workers, judges, foster family members, etc. They will take into account the changing conceptions of childhood, sexuality, family and kinship, of yesterday and today, which shed light on the variables of criminalization and judicialization of incest in the relevant social and historical contexts.

This conference will encourage contributions that shift away from the current representations of incest as an extraordinary act, that decipher its ordinary character and think of it as a societal fact that engages in with functioning of a community. Far from isolating it, the papers will question incest in the broader context of other violence committed against children, within which it is hidden or identified, whether by social workers, judges or researchers. Likewise, they will consider incestual violence within a configuration that goes beyond the expected victim-girl/father-abuser combination, integrating, where necessary, the surroundings and disparate assailants.

This conference will encourage proposals from various disciplinary fields (anthropology, sociology, history, law, medicine, psychoanalysis) and/or from stakeholders in professional contexts (social workers, doctors, judges). The papers will offer diachronic or synchronic analyses of incestual violence, case studies or broader evaluations, using the methods of various approaches (ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, archival studies, professional experiences, etc.).

They may form part of a periodization from the Middle Ages to the present day, encompassing different dimensions (local, national, international) as well as considering comparative analyses.

The papers will be organized around four axes :

1. Disclosing incest in a contemporary context (family; friends and relatives; child protection; courts; associations; etc.)

Current processes of detection, reporting and even management of incestuous situations will be examined in their threefold dimensions: societal, medical and judicial. From what information is incest identified and/or reported? For whom, by whom (family, relatives, neighbors, doctors, social workers, etc.), in what form (editorial, descriptive, moral with signs of “good faith,” etc.), and from which elements? How is a belief constructed in each arena? On what do different professionals base their decision regarding a situation? What is the difference between “risk” and “danger”? How much doubt is involved in their decisions? What views are held by the different staff who receive the children in these reports of the facts involved and the parents? Given that social norms influence representations of crime and of perpetrators, it is necessary to understand to what extent these representations of sexual violence against children and their treatment depend on the sex, age, kinship, and the place in the family and the society (employment, social category) of the alleged perpetrator.

2. Incestuous violence in the judicial context from the Middle Ages until today

The specificities of incest, even its inclusion in a continuum of violence (“moral crimes,” child abuse, infanticide, “libertinism,” etc.) will be examined from the starting point of the process of identifying the “crime” and its sentencing in a judicial context. Do the societal and legal norms that determine or even prevent its repression overlap? Studies may focus on the repressive act, the elements of criminalization, of procedure and of repression: according to what expertise (judicial, medical, etc.) is the crime defined, prosecuted and punished? What language is used to describe the crime, in earlier periods and today, in the scholarly literature, and according to those involved? In criminal cases who is denounced and how? Who attacks who and how? It will also highlight

developments as well as their explanatory factors, legal, social and cultural: what are the conceptions of the incestuous act according to different eras? To what changing conceptions of family, childhood, youth and sexuality, but also of the role of justice, including repression, do they refer? In which contexts does the incestuous act go beyond the workings of justice to interest public debate?

3. Medical and psychoanalytical interpretations of incest and child abuse

The papers will include analyses of medical and psychoanalytical discourse produced around incestuous violence, from the emergence of psychiatric medicine until today (expert reports and medical theory, medical discourse in the media and in testimonials, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries). What conditions of possibility have governed the medical profession's identification of incest as a reality (examination of clothing, of the body)? What are the procedures for designating incestuous acts and actions? What are the familial relationships used to identify incest? How are the stakeholders identified and assessed? How do we explain incest? Has incest been considered in the context of other forms of violence against children? In what ways and under what conditions have the consequences of incest have been identified, taken into account and theorized by physicians?

4. Incestuous violence and its reception in the public arena

How does public opinion deal with what victims of incest say? In what ways and with which stakeholders and mediators is an accusation/revelation made in a visible space, and what are the discussions and contradictory debates? What emotional, interpretative, argumentative and revelatory norms and values systems—shared or conflicting—do high profile court cases raise? What forms of publicity are given to the testimonies of incest victims? What are the historical, socioeconomic (editorial strategies) and personal (at what age, in what situations) contexts of these narratives and what narrative forms do they demonstrate? When does the subject appear in the media and at what intervals? According to what modalities of expression and involving which protagonists (victims, doctors, magistrates, experts, etc.) and finally in which programs? All these questions will be asked in order to grasp the interest it arouses and the way in which it is handled by societal discourse.

Papers will be in French and English. Proposals of **2,500 characters maximum** (including spaces) must include the title, abstract, and major bibliographic references as well as a short presentation of the author (position, field, institutional affiliation). They should be sent by email to: dervi@listes.huma-num.fr before February 15, 2020.

Notification of selected papers: April 30, 2020

Organizing committee: DERVI Team (ANR, CEMS/EHESS-CNRS ; Pléiade/Paris 13) : Anne-Claude Ambroise-Rendu (CHCSC/Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines), Sylvaine Camelin (Paris-Nanterre), Anne-Emmanuelle Demartini (Pléiade/Paris-13), Julie Doyon (FNS-Fribourg/Paris-13), Charlie Duperron (doctorant CEMS/EHESS-CNRS), Fabienne Giuliani (Post-Doctorante CEMS/EHESS-CNRS), Léonore Le Caisne (CEMS/EHESS-CNRS)

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