



PANEL SESSION:
Memory Activism and Corporate Accountability for Human Rights Violations
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Chair: Mariuca Petre, SNSPA Bucharest

Submitting Person: Raluca Grosescu, SNSPA Bucharest

Presenting Authors: Victoria Basualdo, CONICET Argentina; Andru Chiorean, SNSPA Bucharest; Henry P. Rammelt, SNSPA Bucharest; Raluca Grosescu, SNSPA Bucharest

Despite the recurrent complicity of business actors in fueling wars, supporting non-democratic governments and funding repressive military forces, processes of remembering the business involvement in human rights violations remain under-explored in memory studies. This panel aims to fill this gap by examining how civil society and business groups have dealt with the memory of corporate violence in different world regions and historical periods. Focusing on variety of mnemonic actors and sites of memory production (from trials to peoples' tribunals, boycotts and memorials, to corporate reports and archival management) the panel explores the potential of memory activism to enforce political and economic democracy. Victoria Basualdo examines memory initiatives concerning the involvement of transnational corporations in mass crimes during the dictatorships in Argentina (1976 - 1983) and Brazil (1964 - 1985) in comparison with the Nazi regime. Andru Chiorean highlights the role of Permanent Peoples' Tribunals – with a focus on sessions held in Guatemala (2006 - 2010) and South Africa (2016 - 2018) - as arenas of justice and memory that propose more democratic readings of international law from below. Henry Rammelt analyzes how boycotts and divestment campaigns mobilize collective memory to challenge neoliberal imperatives and corporate impunity, with a focus on the Nestlé boycott, the BDS movement and the Rana Plaza campaigns. Raluca Grosescu demonstrates how divergent memories regarding the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996) serve as a central political terrain in

contemporary conflicts over land and economic development in post 1996 Guatemala. Indigenous communities deploy the narrative of the “fourth invasion” to denounce extractivism, while businesses use the specters of “terrorism” to criminalize resistance. By juxtaposing corporate and civil society mnemonic strategies, the panel foregrounds the contradictions of accountability and memory politics concerning corporate crimes, and their dual potential to forge political and economic democracy or reproduce violence and inequalities.

Victoria Basualso: Memory Initiatives Concerning Corporate Responsibility for Human Rights Violations: Insights from Argentina, Brasil and Germany: This paper examines memory initiatives concerning corporate involvement in human rights violations during the last dictatorships in Argentina (1976-1983) and Brasil (1964-1985) and the connections and dialogues with similar experiences concerning the Nazi regime in Germany. Based on archival research, press and judiciary sources, interviews and participant observation, I study various lines of action, including the marking of corporate sites as territories of repression, the use of artistic expressions at memory centers, museums and public spaces, special campaigns at demonstrations and other initiatives promoted by organizations, groups of survivors and different State actors. The paper analyses key cases such as Ford Motor Argentina, Mercedes-Benz, Ledesma, Acindar in Argentina, as well as the struggles and obstacles for creating a memory center on corporate responsibility in Brasil, particularly those focused on the case of Volkswagen. Finally, I explore whether the memory initiatives promoted in Argentina and Brasil regarding the complicity of multinational companies such as Ford, Mercedes-Benz and Volkswagen in dictatorial repression connect with previous memory processes concerning their involvement in mass crimes during the Nazi regime in Germany. The paper thus studies the potential, limitations and constraints of building critical mnemonic narratives of corporate violence in different historical contexts and the tensions and contradictions between different actors and sectors involved in these processes. It argues that justice and memory initiatives concerning the role of private corporations in political, social and labor violence had to face significant obstacles and backlash, as they involved powerful economic actors with strong influence on political and social structures.

Andru Chiorean: Legal Memory from Below: People’s Tribunals and the Transnational Collective Memory of Corporate Crimes: This paper examines how Permanent *People’s Tribunals (PPT)* that address corporate crimes function as transnational forums of legal and social memory. Rooted in the legacy of the Russell Tribunals and grounded in leftist traditions of popular sovereignty and universal justice, PPTs assemble testimonies, documentation, and symbolic verdicts that preserve histories of corporate violence often ignored by states and official courts. Across the world, hearings on extractivism, agribusiness, displacement, and environmental destruction – from agrarian conflicts in Brazil and Mozambique to mining struggles in Guatemala and South Africa - have built extensive archives that chronicle both abuses and resistance. The

paper focuses particularly on PPT sessions held in Guatemala (2006 – 2010) and Swaziland and South Africa (2016 and 2018) both of which have examined the complicity of transnational corporations in human rights violations within their mining and agribusiness operations. I argue that these tribunals are sites of memory activism that seek to reframe international law “from below” and embed corporate violence within longer histories of colonialism and Western liberalism and their effects on structural inequality in the Global South. PPTs generate a form of legal memory which challenges a current dominant order that upholds corporate impunity. Consequently, they construct memory not as passive recollection but as an active political resource that can be mobilized in struggles over recognition, justice, and global regulation of corporate behavior. The paper draws on tribunal archives, official judgments, and campaign materials, as well as interviews with activists, judges, organizers, and NGO representatives involved in hearings. It thus positions PPTs as key memory-making actors in the global struggle against corporate impunity and as sites for reimagining justice “from below”.

Henry P. Rammelt, From Sugar to Sweatshops: The Memory Politics of Boycotts in the Field of Corporate Accountability: This paper analyzes the role of memory in economic activism, focusing on how boycotts and divestment campaigns mobilize collective memory to contest corporate impunity in the global economy. It argues that memory functions as a mobilizing resource and a moral claim that anchors contemporary struggles for justice in longer histories of exploitation and resistance. Movements, activists, and civil society engaged in the struggle for corporate accountability invoke shared memories of colonial extraction, labor repression, and human rights violations to transform market participation into a site of civic engagement and political contestation. Across cases such as the Nestlé boycott, which mobilized the memory of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anti-slavery sugar boycott as a moral genealogy of ethical consumerism; the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which mobilizes collective memory of dispossession and resistance; and the Rana Plaza campaigns, which commemorate the structural violence of global supply chains, memory is mobilized across borders and historical contexts, transforming inherited narratives of injustice into collective demands for accountability in the present. By conceptualizing boycotts and divestments as forms of mnemonic activism, the paper shows how acts of economic refusal both challenge neoliberal imperatives to “move on” and reclaim collective memory as a political instrument. At the same time, corporations engage in strategic memory work, selectively remembering and forgetting past harms through corporate social responsibility narratives and rebranding. The analysis foregrounds the tension between collective memory, used by activists to sustain moral protest, and organizational memory, through which corporations curate, sanitize, or rewrite their own pasts to preserve legitimacy. These conflicting practices of remembrance and erasure reveal the centrality of memory politics to democratic resilience and the struggle for justice, pluralism, and transnational solidarity.

Raluca Grosescu: The Memory of the Guatemalan Civil War and the Struggles to Challenge or Reinforce Neoliberal Extractivism: This paper examines how the memory of the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996) has been mobilized by Guatemalan Indigenous activists and business elites to

either challenge or reinforce neoliberal extractivist projects from 1996 onwards. It argues that divergent mnemonic narratives of the civil war serve as a central political terrain in contemporary conflicts over land and visions of economic development. On the one hand, Indigenous communities denounce the implementation of mining and big agribusiness in their ancestral territories as the “fourth invasion,” after Spanish colonization, the creation of the plantation economy beginning in the late nineteenth century, and the state-sponsored genocide during the civil war. On the other hand, Guatemalan business groups and associations, often backed by political and judicial elites, perpetuate anti-leftist, racist and anti-Indigenous mnemonic narratives forged by the military authorities during the civil war in order to silence human rights and environmental campaigners. They use the specters of “terrorism” and “anti-state insurgency” to prosecute activists and community leaders. While the paradigm of the “fourth invasion” has been useful for creating an Indigenous culture of solidarity against neoliberal development, Guatemala remains one of the deadliest and most repressive countries in the world for human rights defenders. The mnemonic accounts constructed by the military during the civil war remain deeply embedded within the most powerful political and economic circles and serve as ideological tools to delegitimize and criminalize Indigenous claims regarding their right to land and alternative economic development. The paper thus highlights the dual potential of memory politics to forge political and economic democracy or reproduce violence, exploitation and inequalities.

Mariuca Petre (SNSPA) “Memory and Justice for Corporate Involvement in Human Rights Violations. A Critical Assessment”: This paper reflects on the values and limitations of memory activism promoted by both civil society organizations and business groups to enhance corporate accountability and a more democratic global governance. It highlights the importance of actor-focused approaches to memory politics: various social groups, with different ideological orientation and different political and economic interests, use social memory to legitimize their own visions about democracy, economic globalizations and human rights. Actor-focused analyses of memory politics regarding corporate crimes are essential to moving beyond depoliticised accounts and situate memory politics in wider relations of power within capitalist society. Memory activism has thus to be understood as a contentious field that can construct a more democratic society, but can also reproduce violence, impunity and socio-economic inequalities.