

REBECCA CLIFFORD

Holocaust Commemoration and Generational "Memory": Interpreting the Purpose(s) of Official Commemoration in France and Italy

Since 1993, when France instituted its 'Journée nationale commémorative des persécutions racistes et antisémites commises sous l'autorité de fait dite "gouvernement de l'Etat français"', the majority of European states have instituted some form of official Holocaust commemoration. Political actors are often credited with the creation of these commemorations, but a closer examination of their origins shows that the state is often the last party to become involved in debates concerning the perceived need for official memorialisation. This talk will look at the formation of official Holocaust commemorations in France (1993) and Italy (2000), examining the civil groups involved in the process, and exploring and interrogating the importance of differing generational approaches to the issue of commemoration. Those who most vocally advocated official commemorations were, in both France and Italy, members of a generation that had come of age after the war, and had often been deeply affected by the mass social movements of 1968. Their insistence that commemoration should focus on issues of justice and responsibility clashed with the vision of an older generation, which imagined commemoration primarily in terms of mourning and communal identity.

These conflicting interpretations of the purpose of Holocaust commemoration were challenged yet again by younger participants, who in some cases envisaged commemoration as a tool for shaping and strengthening contemporary Jewish identity and/or a reinvigorated 'anti-Fascism'. This paper will argue that these different visions of the role and function of commemoration spurred an often-controversial debate that was the real catalyst for the creation of official Holocaust commemorations. Rather than credit states with their inception, we should look to civil society to understand how and why official Holocaust commemorations were instituted so widely in Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.

This paper will draw material from a recently-finished research project that is soon to be published by Oxford University Press as *Days of Reckoning: Holocaust Commemoration in France and Italy*. The project compares the evolution of official Holocaust commemoration in France and Italy in the 1990s and 2000s, and examines the ways in which debates surrounding commemoration spurred a wide-ranging reconsideration of each nation's wartime history.

Rebecca Clifford (R.A.Clifford@swansea.ac.uk) is a Lecturer in Modern History at Swansea University, UK.