**When the past is political:** Negotiating the future of conflicts through remembrance.

Public Discussion by **Prof.** **David Wood\***

Introduction by **Prof. Virginie Collombier\***

**23/04/2024 - Luiss University, Viale Romania, Room 305, from 17:00 to 18:30.**

The “uses and abuses of history” (Margaret MacMillan) in politics is not new. Yet contentious histories seem to play an increasing role in political discourse, whether domestically, as western countries struggle with colonial legacies, or internationally, as countries at war use history and trauma to justify their use of violence and to mobilize global backing. Through history, memory has been widely used as a tool to incite war and to mobilise social divisions through hatred and revenge.

The increased presence of visual testimonies and their dissemination through social media increase the emotional impact of history and exposes collective memory to deception and misrepresentation. The global reach of "memory wars" is amplified and transformed, with the capacity to inflame social and political tensions in real time around the world.

Memory can also become an essential tool for healing communities wounded and torn apart by national and transnational conflicts. Remembrance, through public and private moments of commemoration, can be a vehicle for transforming conflicts and building unity and cohesion in divided communities.

The event aims to focus on the ethical duty that social and political leaders have in addressing the ambivalent issue of remembrance and commemoration: as an amplifier of violence and as a tool for social and human reconciliation.

The discussion aims to provide the opportunity to test a new framework for Ethical Political Commemoration, drawing on academic research and learning from international conflict resolution case studies.

**This event is based on the [recently published book](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-31594-7)\* by David Wood and Hans Gutbrod. It also builds on the work of the Luiss Mediterranean Platform in Libya, part of the European Union funded project ['The Platform for Libya's Future'](https://mp.luiss.it/activities/libya-platform/).**

\*The book proposes a new [Ethics of Political Commemoration](https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-31594-7) adapted from the Just War tradition, reflecting that remembrance is often conducted with political – and even coercive – intent. With its Ius ad Memoriam (what to commemorate) and Ius in Memoria (how to commemorate) criteria, the framework looks to guide debates that are currently inchoate so that remembrance of the past can transform relationships in the present and build a shared future. Offering a moral argument with memorable illustrations, Gutbrod and Wood draw on experiences from Armenia, Georgia, Ireland, Lebanon, and Libya, while connecting to mainstream debates in Western Europe and the United States. Bringing together an ethical tradition with the practice of conflict transformation, the framework fuses two perspectives that enrich each other. The book, in providing a first systematic presentation of the ethics, seeks to engage citizens and scholars, and help those who work to transform conflicts.

**\*David Wood** is Professor of Practice at the School of Diplomacy and International Relations, Seton Hall University, and Senior Researcher at the Graduate Institute in Geneva. He has 18 years’ experience of promoting conflict transformation in violent settings, establishing the peacebuilding organisation Peaceful Change initiative (2011), and the MENA program at the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (2018).

**\*Prof. Virginie Collombier** is the scientific coordinator of the Mediterranean Platform and Professor of Practice at the School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli University. She coordinates policy-relevant research and dialogues on the security, political economy and socio-political transformations affecting the MENA region and the broader Mediterranean. She also directs several projects combining policy-oriented field research, research mentorship with support for homegrown mediation initiatives and policy dialogues in Libya.