



Handout „Culture of remembrance“

Outline

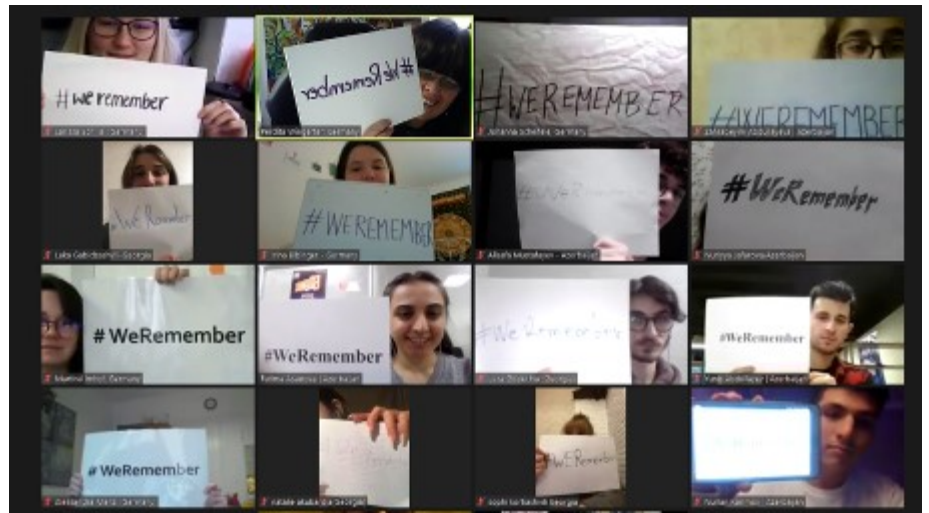
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Memory is changing all the time. Old things are erased, new things are added, and existing things are modified. This is true not just of human memory. Whole communities, even nations, are said to have a collective memory or the ability to "remember" events that give rise to identity – and to recall and pass them on in the form of narratives, traditions or commemorative events. What a community remembers and how it does so is part of its culture of remembrance.

1. What means remembrance?

Remembrance, noun:

- a retained mental impression; memory.
- the act or fact of remembering.
- the power or faculty of remembering.
- the length of time over which recollection or memory extends.
- the state of being remembered; commemoration: to hold someone's name in remembrance.
- something that serves to bring to mind or keep in mind some place, person, event, etc.; memento.



2. Definition of Remembrance cultures

Remembrance culture = is all the set of behaviour and socially approved or acquired manners of a society or group used to keep parts of the past in their consciousness and thus deliberately make it present. It is "the specific way in which a community deals with the past" (Hahn u. a.).

Distinction between:

- private remembrance culture
- public remembrance culture
- respective regular and event-based elements

Private or **individual** remembrance culture is expressed for example:

- Family albums, genealogical research or anniversaries with personal or familial significance

Public Remembrance Culture can officially be shown for example in form:

- cultural artefacts or cultural monuments if there is a long-standing public interest
- Annual parades or national remembrance days

Characteristics of remembrance culture:

- most of the time not the display of historical and objective knowledge
- the collective and subjective perceptions of historical connections to the past, influenced by a current perspective
- collective perceptions shape subjective ones
- social conflicts, relationships and problems influence a remembrance culture
- in a pronounced culture of remembrance, less emphasized elements are likely to be forgotten



Astrid Erll, Professor of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures, defines cultures of remembrance as the "historically and culturally variable characteristics of collective memory". According to this definition, "we will never be dealing with just one community of remembrance, even in the most homogeneous cultures". In other words: Culture of remembrance is "the specific way in which a community deals with the past" (Hahn u. a.).

3. Expressions and Forms

Particularly within the public Culture of Remembrance, expressions can be found in a variety of initiatives and approaches:

- the archiving of information,
- its scientific innovation and finally public documentation
- other media presentation
- memorial sites
- monuments

EVENTS

- commemoration days
- historians Dispute
- social discussions about different topic areas.

Remembrance culture and politics

- They very quickly touch on political interests and for that reason they are also subjected to a potential instrumentalisation through current affairs
- Thereby, questions concerning the Culture of Remembrance, thus the perception of it are closely linked with questions regarding authorizing claims to power and that of creating a national identity
- In many cases, this leads to the government ritualization of the Culture of Remembrance and determines a number of taboos in society
- The politicisation of remembrance culture is above all noticeable in regime changes, in which the previous understanding of past events is altered under new leadership
- An obvious example is the way in which we approach monuments, which commemorate heroes from past regimes



- They however are not honored in the same way following a change in regime

4. Examples

In Germany, Austria and in many other countries, the Culture of Remembrance („Erinnerungskultur“ in German) is essentially a synonym for remembering the Holocaust and the sacrifices made during National Socialism. Antisemitism, antigypsyism, racism and discrimination – more than 76 years after the end of the National Socialist reign of terror, they belong to everyday life in Germany and characterise social debates.



For a long time, the German culture of remembrance could be better described as a culture of repression. While the post-war Bonn Republic didn't want to know anything about its own crimes, the GDR, as an anti-fascist state per own definition, rejected any responsibility for National Socialist crimes. The rigid silence of post-war German society was broken for the first time with the

student movement of the 1960s. They challenged their parents as well as German society as a whole to finally face up to their past and crimes.

The culture of remembrance in Germany has changed and developed continuously ever since. Today, the remembrance of German history and the responsibility derived from it are part of the German reason of state – a milestone that is also expressed in the name of the EVZ Foundation (Remembrance, Responsibility and Future). In recent decades, more and more work has been done to come to terms with history and remembrance in an attempt to understand the causes for the emergence of the National Socialist regime and thereby to contribute to ensuring that history is not repeated.

However, a central aspect of the Culture of Remembrance is not only the German experience, but also genocides that have occurred or are still occurring in other countries - especially when this also still affects disadvantaged minorities. Examples of such genocide are Namibia (the Herero and Nama genocide), Armenia and Turkey (the Armenian Genocide) and Rwanda (the Rwandan Genocide). There are also examples such the acts of Stalin in the Soviet Union, Chairman Mao's regime in China or the war crimes committed by the Japanese army in eastern Asia during the Second Sino-Japanese War. They are still of huge significance with their predominantly strong, ritualized ways of remembrance. Nevertheless, they are in many respects not properly reviewed.

5. Approaches to keep memory alive

- Today, **schools** in particular have become an important place for a critical examination of the National Socialist past and for imparting a culture of remembrance
- **Documentaries, cinema and television films, memorial sites and monuments** as well as encounters with people who survived National Socialist persecution also help to keep the memory of the National Socialist era and its victims alive in the collective awareness and play a significant part in coming to terms with the past
- International and national days of remembrance like the 27.1. the “International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust” or the 9.11. the day “Commemoration of the Reichsprogrom Night/ The Night of Broken Glass“

But are the current forms of the German culture of remembrance still sufficient and up-to-date?

We have to ask ourselves and find answer to the following questions:

- How viable is the memory-cultural consensus of German society?
- Are the perspectives of minorities (Jews, Roma and Sinti, people of color, migrants, diasporic communities, LGTQ minorities) taken into account, or do narrative forms favored by the majority of society about National Socialism, its genocide and its aftermath dominate?
- What happens when different communities of remembrance meet?

6. Role of the EVZ Foundation

The Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (German: Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft; acronym EVZ), is a German Federal organisation with the purpose of making financial compensation available "to former forced laborers and to those affected by other injustices from the National Socialist period." Additionally the EVZ provides project funding to support international programmes and projects a) critical examination of history, b) working for human rights, and c) the commitment to the victims of National Socialism.

In this way, the EVZ Foundation – especially within the framework of its field of activity Education – funds projects that encourage reflection on the history of National Socialism, especially NS forced labor in European memories, and document, pass on, and make available the experiences of victims of National Socialism in a sustainable manner for historical-political education; the projects also contribute to the further development of cultures of remembrance in Germany's migration society.

The question of whether new approaches to remembrance are necessary is currently high up on the agenda of the EVZ Foundation and the institutions that it supports. For example, new digital formats for a critical examination of National Socialism will be developed and tested in the EVZ funding program "digital // memory".

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