

# On the Culture of Memory. Why Do Societies Remember?

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**ABSTRACT:** The study deals with the essence of the dynamic historical memory. What is the heart of the disputes over memory? Why are there still new debates on the interpretation of the past? Tensions in social memory lie in the relation between memory and identity. Memory is not in any way neutral, but ideologically and politically tinged and in this sense also conquered. The logic of creating boundaries between “us” and “the others” is inscribed in the debate about memory and its role not only in historically questionable events, but also in obvious forms of presentation of history. Therefore it is good to mention already in the introductory chapters of schoolbooks, that there is specific Austrian, German, French etc. history, which differs from other national histories, or more importantly, that history is constructed on the basis of national criteria. An attempt to create international history books as an alternative to the books written according to national criteria is still in its infancy.

Keywords: historical memory, identity, society, cultural history, history of ideas

Memory is a dynamic concept. It is also indicated by the study of an Austrian teacher. In the early 1980's she was blamed for visiting the Mauthausen concentration camp with her class. Today parents keep asking when their children will finally visit Mauthausen.<sup>1</sup>

A school practice-based experience reflects transformations of social memories and a new relevance that was reached by memory in the last two decades – and not just in Austria. An interest in how societies create a culture of memory<sup>2</sup> is an international phenomenon of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## *New interest in memory*

An idea that societies repeatedly take a new stand to their pasts forms the basis of the concept of collective memory that was developed by a French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920's. Only that will remain from the past “what a society can reconstruct by its own unique approach in each period”. This was formulated by Halbwachs in his in 1925 published work *Memory and Its Social Conditions* (Les cadres sociaux la mémoire).<sup>3</sup> It was translated to German as late as in 1985 – this very fact can be also seen as an indicator of an increased interest in memory in the mid-1980's.

<sup>1</sup> Statement during the discussion within the lesson “Education at the places of memory”, College of Education, Linz/Upper Austria 2008.

<sup>2</sup> CONNERTON, Paul. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> HALBWACHS, Maurice. *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1985, p. 390.

The first impetus for the renewed interest in the past did not, however, come from scholars, but from the initiatives in other social spheres. For example, the so-called Grassroot-movements, alternative historical workshops in Berlin and other German cities, looked for historical reference points for their own sense of life and they began to examine history of emancipation and conflicting movements on site. "Dig where you are standing!" (Sven Lindqvist, 1978) became a slogan of one such historical work "from below". At the same time, demanding historical large-scale exhibitions became a successful "higher culture" instrument enabling the visitors to adopt the heritage and traditions. In 1977 *The Age of the Staufer Family* exposition (also the Hohenstaufen) in Stuttgart attracted more than 671,000 visitors. The exhibitions on the Wittelsbach family in Munchen (1980) and on Prussia in Berlin (1981) were visited by thousand hundreds of persons.<sup>4</sup> In Austria the exposition *Dream and Reality. Vienna around 1900* (1985) became a magnet for visitors. These projects expressed and catalyzed a new "interest in history"<sup>5</sup> that headed towards a positive perception of history – this could rely on bright historical and cultural heritage as well as on buried revolutionary traditions of the labour movement and the opposition to National Socialism.

#### *Historical heritage and national myths*

However, looking for self-assurance by means of historical heritage, which current social groups could refer to or which would legitimize them, is not new at all. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century the references to a glorious history full of sacrifice have belonged to the most important tools of *nation-building*. "The introduced community" of the nation<sup>6</sup> needed a sense of "We" – this *sense of belonging*. The sense of an individual's affiliation with the abstract concept of nation has been an essential precondition of solidary community in modern societies.<sup>7</sup> To fulfil this idea national emblems are required: national flag and banner, national emblem, national anthem, national holiday as well as the derivation of nation from a hundred- if not thousand-year history. Allegedly, ancient traditions are, however, a fabrication of the forming national states of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>8</sup> as the identity and memory of a nation are always constructed on the basis of current opinions.<sup>9</sup> However, it does not threaten the success of national myths,<sup>10</sup> since they prove to be resistant to any scientific effort for deconstruction.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BURLAGE, Martin. *Große historische Ausstellungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1960 - 2000*. Münster : LIT Verlag, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> ASSMANN, Aleida. Konstruktion von Geschichte in Museen. In *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*. Available on the internet: <<http://www.das-parlament.de/2007/49/Beilage/002.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> ANDERSON, Benedikt. *Die Erfindung der Nation. Zur Karriere eines erfolgreichen Konzepts*. Frankfurt am Main : Campus-Verlag, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> GELLNER, Ernest. *Nationalismus und Moderne*. Berlin : Rotbuch-Verlag, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> HOBSBAWN, Eric. Das Erfinden von Traditionen. In CONRAD, Christoph - KESSEL, Martina (eds.). *Kultur und Geschichte. Neue Einblicke in eine alte Beziehung*. Stuttgart : Reclams Universal Bibliothek, 1998, pp. 97-118.

<sup>9</sup> WODAK, Ruth et al. *Zur diskursiven Konstruktion nationaler Identität*. Frankfurt am Main : Peter-Lang, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. FLACKE, Monika (ed.). *Mythen der Nationen. Ein europäisches Panorama*. Berlin : Koehler & Amelang, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> For Austria cf. BREUSS, Susanne - LIEBHART, Karin - PRIBERSKY, Andreas. *Insenierungen. Stichwörter*

They can also adapt to different circumstances: states are disintegrated or established, but the myths and narration of history can make a remarkable connecting force during a short period of time. Thus, for instance, in 1946 Austria celebrated the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first mention of the name “Ostarrîchi” (a language and content connection of which with the term “Österreich” is questioned at the scientific level) so that the culture defined as “German” during the years 1938 – 1945, could be named “Austrian”.

Nations do not build only on a rationally based solidarity, but they also need emotionally efficient symbols and rituals in order to awaken a sense of togetherness. National myths spread their impact by various means: memorial days, museums, representative buildings such as parliaments or cultural buildings, cultural monuments and street names. These inscribe the national histories and their military, political and cultural heroes in the public space. On the other hand, a canonized knowledge of the past is provided by schoolbooks.

Historical instilling of identity in the service of national ideas in the forming stage of a nation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also had its own novelty: it was no longer a dynastic principle, glory of monarch and ruling court that should have been worshipped, but an idea of nation. Nationality should have ceased to be a question of class and social status. It was open to all, regardless their social status – in this respect a national idea was, above all, a fruit of the French revolution and its main idea *liberté-égalité-fraternité*: liberty-equality-fraternity. The participation of a nation was, however, defined differently. A French model was based on a political participation, on a will to want to be a part of nation. On the other hand, since in that time Germany, unlike France, consisted of several middle-sized and small states and the role of a multinational Habsburg monarchy was unclear, the ideas of German thinkers as Johann Gottfried Herder could not be based on a territorial state. Based on the missing state context, an idea of common language, culture and history became a basis of the German national movement – with fatal consequences, because language and cultural or religiously compact spaces in the social reality were an exception rather than a rule. An idea of homogenous language and cultural nations would create, especially in the Habsburg monarchy’s multiethnic regions and cities emerging due to immigration,<sup>12</sup> conflicting potential, for which, eventually, “the state of many nations” failed.

#### *Functionalization of culture and history*

Functionalization of culture and history by increasing radical nationalist currents and a related propagation of national enemies, but primarily a contamination of the idea of nation with National Socialism, led to a caesura – after 1945 a referring to the historical greatness of the nation was for former states of the Third Reich no longer appropriate.<sup>13</sup> A precondition for the identity of the Federal Republic of Germany

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*ter zu Österreich.* Wien : Sonderzhal, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. HAMANN, Brigitte. *Hitlers Wien. Lehrjahre eines Diktators.* München : Piper, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> LEPSIUS, M. Rainer. Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des „Großdeutschen Reiches“. In HALLER, Max - HOFFMANN-NOWOTNY, Hans-Joachim - ZAPE, Wolfgang (eds.). *Kultur und Gesellschaft. Verhandlungen des 24. Deutschen Soziologentages, des 11. Österreichischen Soziologentages und des 8. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Zürich*

was to abandon the heritage of German nationalism. The identity of FRG referred to the constitution and free and democratic principles. Ideological concepts of FRG were based on identification with labour movement in the struggle for the rights of workers, as well as with the opposition to National Socialism. After 1945, Austria wanted to be distinguished from Germany as much as possible. Austrian nation – especially on the basis of its unique land and cultural heritage – was, to a certain extent, able to re-invent itself and thus obscure the question of National Socialism, World War II and the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup>

During the economic boom in 1960's and 1970's, social energy was diverted to new and promising topics: Slogans and visions of all-encompassing social reform, the progress in all fields of life, democratization and emancipation<sup>15</sup> affected the collective imagination just like the legitimization from the past, also depending on the system competition of the Cold War.

In this context, the initiatives created by a new interest in the past in the following 1970's and early 1980's became an indicator for the return of history to the sphere of social self-representation and self-assurance – and related conflicts. Because to tell “our history” of a village, city, nation, public and private institutions, means to select from a variety of different, contradictory pasts and to create *the past*, that is supposed to represent our past. However, every village, every city and every institution consists of a microcosm of social locales and individual lives – therefore it is virtually impossible to capture even a single day in its complexity. “What does a pensioner from the opposite house have in common with students of the Institute of Contemporary History, besides the spatial proximity?” asked a historian Helmut Konrad from the University of Graz during one of his seminars on the history of everyday life just to emphasize the complexity of history. Even a history of a school class would sound differently if it was told by a pupil or a teacher or a school inspector or an independent observer.

What is important and what is less important, which events and personalities stand in the foreground and which of them are marginalized or are not mentioned at all, is determined by those groups that hold power over the interpretation of history and that wrote the history and introduced it to the broad public on monuments, in museums, books, etc. In a pluralistic, differentiated society, the power of definition is not, however, restricted to only one group. It is always the subject of struggle and discussion. The culture of memory thus becomes a dynamic space for negotiations and conflicts and an open process of reaching a consensus on what belongs to the history of a group or society, where other alternative depictions would be also still possible.

The results of the competition in the shaping of collective memory rank from the adoption and strengthening of tradition and historical heritage up to the modification and absolute rejection of previous ideas of the past. At the same time, however, criticism and opposition reflect the relevance of a historical reference point to the present. What remains in memory, as Maurice Halbwachs observed, is what current societies

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1988. Frankfurt am Main : Campus Verlag, 1989, pp. 247-264.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BRUCKMULLER, Ernst. *Nation Österreich. Kulturelles Bewußtsein und gesellschaftlich-politische Prozesse*. Wien : Böhlau, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> For Austria, see HANISCH, Ernst. *Der lange Schatten des Staates. Österreichische Gesellschaftsgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert*. Wien : Böhlau, 2005.

can update. What cannot be anchored in the “functional memory” (Aleida Assmann<sup>16</sup>), it will fade into obscurity. It is the case, for instance, of the military memory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although there are many corresponding monuments in different parts of Austria, today they meet with no response. Thus, they became socially “invisible”.

A lapse of time from historical events is not the deciding factor. The Turkish capture of Vienna in 1683 still has its place in the Austrian memory and can be used for hostile expressions. On the other hand, the revolution of 1848 is not significant at all. In Hungary and other central European states, however, this date is a reference point for the emergence of national movements and the struggle against the oppression by the Habsburg monarchy.<sup>17</sup>

*Memory and identity: Debates on the interpretation of the past*

What is, therefore, the heart of the disputes over memory? Why are there still new debates on the interpretation of the past? Tensions in social memory lie in the relation between memory and identity. Memory is not in any way neutral, but ideologically and politically tinged and in this sense also conquered, as Jan Assmann stated: “The subjects of the cultural memory are characterized by a certain identification partiality in a positive (We are this) or in a negative (That is our opposite) sense.”<sup>18</sup> Memory thus constitutes “the line between the participation or nonparticipation in the group, i.e. between the one’s own and somebody else’s.”<sup>19</sup> The logic of creating boundaries between “us” and “the others” is inscribed in the debate about memory and its role not only in historically questionable events, but also in obvious forms of presentation of history. Therefore it is good to mention already in the introductory chapters of schoolbooks, that there is specific Austrian, German, French, etc. history, which differs from other national histories, or more importantly, that history is constructed on the basis of national criteria. An attempt to create international history books as an alternative to the books written according to national criteria<sup>20</sup> is still in its infancy.

The connection between identity and memory is also stressed by two most important bases of cultural-scientific theory of memory that have extended the Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory, namely that by Pierre Nora (he established the term of “place of memory”) and that by Jan Assmann.<sup>21</sup>

The category “place of memory” may denote various objects – the Cathedral of Reims, the Notre Dame Cathedral as well as small military monuments, wordbooks, lexicons and literature for children, sport events, such as Tour de France, or “typical” representatives of national identities, such as national cuisines.

<sup>16</sup> ASSMANN, Aleida. *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München : C.H. Beck, 1999.

<sup>17</sup> FLÄCKE, Mythen.

<sup>18</sup> ASSMANN, Jan. Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität. In ASSMANN, Jan - HÖLSCHER, Tonio (eds.). *Kultur und Gedächtnis*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See the project of the German-French history schoolbook “Histoire/Geschichte”, available on the internet: <[http://www.klett.de/projekte/geschichte/dfgb/index\\_k.html](http://www.klett.de/projekte/geschichte/dfgb/index_k.html)>.

<sup>21</sup> ERL, Astrid. Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. In NÜNNING, Angsgar (ed.). *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaften. Theoretische Grundlagen, Ansätze, Perspektiven*. Stuttgart : Metzler, 2008, pp. 156-185.

In his three-volume work *Lieux de mémoire*,<sup>22</sup> the French historian Pierre Nora took for his starting point a stable (although not fixed) norm of historical reference points, a concept that was adopted in other countries as well, such as Italy (*I luoghi della memoria*<sup>23</sup>), Germany (*Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*<sup>24</sup>) and Austria (*Memoria Austriae*<sup>25</sup>). Critics, however, point to the fact that the very creation of the norm for national places of memory already introduces the logic of inclusion and exclusion, as, according to the introduced logic, everything which does not occur in these compendia, is of no or only a little importance for the identification repertoire of a society. Certain groups, such as migrants, are excluded or insufficiently represented. So the concept of “places of memory” also reflects the idea of a homogenous national identity and thus contributes to the “invention” of nation.<sup>26</sup>

*The “knowledge” of the past is shared and passed down*

In his concept of cultural memory, Jan Assmann took for his starting point another question: How are societies, often for centuries, able to pass down the “collectively shared knowledge” of the past?<sup>27</sup> The answer lies in the cultural formation, ritualization and institutionalization of social memories: Preserving the “collectively shared knowledge”, its “transmission in the culturally institutionalized heritage of a society” requires a continuous “care”. Exemplary are, therefore, religions that in their “islands of time” focus on events that go thousands of years back, as it is in case of religious holidays such as Christmas, the Jewish holiday Hanukkah, and the holiday of revelation of the Quran.<sup>28</sup>

Assmann’s definition of memory as the “collectively shared knowledge” from which a group “derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity” draws attention to the role of a society, as well as to the movements in the field of memory – synchronous, in case of formulation and self-assertion of a certain knowledge of the past, as well as diachronic – within the meaning of the processes of passing down, transmission and change of this amount of knowledge. This also hides a potential of conflicts – contradictory historical events are exactly those where a question arises which groups should form collective ideas and assert their definitions and norms – this is, of course, a subject of discussion. In Austria, for instance, it can be visible in the ever recurring debate about Austrofascism or the authoritarian regime of 1933 – 1938, and in branding Engelbert Dollfuß “a murderer of workers” or “the first victim of National Socialism”.

<sup>22</sup> NORA, Pierre (ed.). *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Paris : Gallimard (Bibliothèque illustrée des histoires), 1984-1992, 1997.

<sup>23</sup> ISNENGI Mario (ed.). *I luoghi della memoria*, 3 voll. Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996-1997.

<sup>24</sup> FRANCOIS, Etienne - SCHULZE, Hagen. Einleitung. In FRANCOIS, Etienne - SCHULZE, Hagen (eds.). *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3. Band. München : Beck, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> BRIX, Emil - BRUCKMÜLLER, Ernst - STEKL, Hannes (eds.). *Memoria Austriae*. Band 1-3. Wien : Oldenbourg, 2004-2005.

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. CSÁKY, Moritz. Gedächtnis, Erinnerungen und die Konstruktion von Identität. Das Beispiel Zentraleuropa. In BOSSHART-PFLUGGER, Catherine - JUNG, Joseph - METZGER, Franziska (eds.). *Nation und Nationalismus in Europa. Kulturelle Konstruktionen von Identitäten. Festschrift für Urs Altermatt*. Wien : Huber, 2002, pp. 25-50.

<sup>27</sup> Definition of memory according to ASSMANN, Kollektives Gedächtnis, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-14.

The nature of discussion also depends on the “hierarchy of memory” (Jan Assmann), by which the field of memory is structured. In each society there are many particular forms of memory that are related to certain groups – from political parties up to sport societies, from big institutions and companies up to local museums. A depiction of the history of the University of Graz or the Alp Society primarily represents these respective institutions and the disputes and conflicts about the depiction of their histories within a certain exposition or a book are discussed within this framework. Official state memory is potentially related to every member of nation – it is a case of history of “all of us”.<sup>29</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that contradictory are especially projects like the Austrian “House of History” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand, it is very likely that the interpretation of history in schoolbooks is a result of a thorough discussion.

Memory, however, does not “germinate” only at the national places of memory and social identities. The transmission of the knowledge of the past is performed in many ways – in everyday communication in families, with colleagues at work, friends and neighbours, to a certain extent “en passant”.<sup>30</sup> Jan Assmann described these forms of narration as “communicative memory” that, unlike the “cultural memory”, has a limited temporal horizon. This horizon extends back to a certain historical turning point about which we can talk to our grandparents or grand grandparents – according to Assmann it is about 80 years.<sup>31</sup>

Although “communicative memory” lacks durability, it often causes tensions between the “cultural memory” of a society and those views that are communicated and passed down by living witnesses in their families and other societies. Potential contradictions between the cultural and the communicative, between the public and the private may, especially in case of contradictory events, cause conflicts. This can be, for instance, visible in discussions on the violent history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that have been performed in many European countries since the 1980’s (but later as well). Within this “war of memories”<sup>32</sup> a new form of memory emerged: “negative memory” is connected with those crimes which one’s own society committed or in which it participated.

### *Negative memories and the violent history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Assmanns’ establishment of the cultural memory does not only assign the culture of remembering with the function of creation of identity, but it also perceives it as a seismograph of the moral and ethical state (*Verfasstheit*) of a society: “On the basis of its cultural heritage and traditions, a society is recognizable: for itself as well as for others. What kind of the past and what identification values a society shows to good

<sup>29</sup> MACHART, Oliver. Das historisch-politische Gedächtnis. Für eine politische Theorie des kulturellen Gedächtnisses. In GERBEL, Christian et. al. *Transformationen gesellschaftlicher Erinnerung. Transdisziplinäre Studien zur Gedächtnisgeschichte der Zweiten Republik*. Wien : Turia + Kant, 2004, pp. 21-49.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. WELZER, Harald. *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*. München : C.H. Beck, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> ASSMANN, Kollektives Gedächtnis, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> WELZER, Harald (ed.). *Der Krieg der Erinnerungen. Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis*. Frankfurt am Main : Fischer Taschenbuch, 2007.

advantage indicates its character and in which direction it wants to be heading.<sup>33</sup> In the 1980's the emerging attempts to do research on memory began to be accompanied by breaking the views of the National Socialism and the World War II in European countries. After 1945 the evaluation of the national-socialist past was different in Western European and Eastern European countries. Both of them, however, can be described as variants of a European post-war myth that was characterized by Tony Judt, a historian at the New York University, as follows: The own nation is being depicted as an innocent victim of a horrible occupation regime. Memories of the own heroic national or antifascist resistance against German occupants define the culture of memory. The question of the guilt with respect to the crimes of National Socialism and especially the responsibility for the Holocaust is being devolved to Germany or the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>34</sup>

*New generation puts new questions to history*

Tackling the “unresolved” history of National Socialism can be seen at several levels. New generation that was not involved in the national-socialist society, would put new questions to history. This was often caused by contradictions between official memory on the one hand and local discussions and cultures of memory on the other. A developed new sensibility for contemporary monuments which so far have not been perceived, seems to be an indicator. The monuments were not longer be perceived as memorials to the deceased, but as “identification stimuli for those who had survived”, as was formulated for military monuments by Reinhard Koselleck.<sup>35</sup>

The monuments, as well as their absence, led to local conflicts. “To honour and/or to be offended”<sup>36</sup> became a motto of new perspective on the culture of memory that vents its anger on traditional forms of worship of the fallen, but primarily criticizes a lack of memorials to the victims of National Socialism.<sup>37</sup> In Austria, this empty space was very evident. While the victims of National Socialism, at least outside Vienna, had no memorials, there were war memorials that also integrated Hitler's Wehrmacht. Virtually, in each community soldiers of the German Wehrmacht were worshipped at a prominent place together with the WWI soldiers as “protectors of the homeland”.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> ASSMANN, Kollektives Gedächtnis, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. JUDT, Tony. Die Vergangenheit ist ein anderes Land : Politische Mythen im Nachkriegseuropa. In *Transit* 6, 1993, pp. 87-120.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. KOSELLECK, Reinhard. Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden. In MARQUAD, Odo - STIERLE, Karlheinz (eds.). *Identität (= Poetik und Hermeneutik VII)*. München : Wilhelm Fink, 1979, pp. 255-276. In Koselleck's study, perhaps for the first time, a connection between a monument and identity was established and the importance of these ephemeral objects for an analysis of collective attitudes was acknowledged.

<sup>36</sup> SPIELMANN, Jochen. Stein des Anstoßes oder Schlußstein der Auseinandersetzungen? Bemerkungen zum Prozeß der Entstehung von Denkmalen und zu aktuellen Tendenzen. In MAI, Ekkehard - SCHMIRBER, Gisela (eds.). *Denkmal - Zeichen - Monument. Skulptur und öffentlicher Raum heute*. München : Prestel-Verlag, 1989, pp. 110-114.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. by way of example of Hamburg THIEßEN, Malte. Das kollektive als lokales Gedächtnis : Plädoyer für eine Lokalisierung von Geschichtspolitik. In SCHMID, Harald (ed.). *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskulturen in Theorie und Praxis (= Formen der Erinnerungen 41)*. Göttingen : V & R Unipress, 2009, pp. 159-180.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. UHL, Heidemarie. Kriegsdenkmäler. In BRIX, Emil - BRUCKMÜLLER, Ernst - STECKL, Hannes (eds.). *Memoria Austriae I. Menschen - Mythen - Zeiten*. Wien : Oldenbourg, 2004, pp. 545-559.



The declaration of independence on 27 April 1945 saw them as the victims of the “senseless war of conquest” “that had never been wanted by any Austrian.”<sup>39</sup>

In the mid-1980’s, erosion of post-war myths begins at official level too, e.g. in the Federal Republic of Germany and in France. In 1986 a conflict about the wartime past of Kurt Waldheim caused a principal social debate on how to deal with the “un-resolved” past of National Socialism.<sup>40</sup> In general, it can be stated that society-wide debates on one’s own involvement in the violent history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became a feature of European political culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, the Holocaust was shifted not only to the centre of the history of National Socialism or the “perpetrating societies”, but also to the centre of history as such.<sup>42</sup> The “civilization turn Auschwitz” is increasingly perceived as a crime against the humankind by which civilization fundamentals of the Western world have been irritated for over a long period of time, as the planning and implementation of killing European Jews and Jewesses was initiated by a modern and enlightened country in the centre of Europe.<sup>43</sup>

In the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria, as well as in many other European countries, the question of their participation on this crime became a catalyst of a new form of memory: “negative memories” of their own guilt.<sup>44</sup> National memory is usually aimed at a positive identification with the past, e.g. by remembering one’s own successful history or a common statute of victim. “Memory of guilt” is aimed at the question of individual and collective co-responsibility for the crimes committed in the name of the whole community.

At a stage discussion, an artist Jochen Gerz observed: To know should mean to take a responsibility.<sup>45</sup> A consequent need to show respect to the victims of National Socialism began to fuel many commemorative projects. Among them there are national representations such as the Holocaust memorials in Vienna and Berlin<sup>46</sup> and state monuments at the sites of the National Socialism crimes. However, local or private initiatives are also engaged in commemoration of the National Socialism victims that have been overlooked in the memory as yet. “Stumbling blocks”, a project

<sup>39</sup> Declaration from 27 April 1945. In *Staatsgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich, 1. Mai 1945*. Available on the internet: <<http://www.verfassungen.de/at/unabhaengigkeit45.htm>>

<sup>40</sup> Cf. UHL, Heidemarie. *Von Opfermythos zur Mitverantwortungsthese : NS - Herrschaft, Krieg und Holocaust im „österreichischen Gedächtnis“*. In GERBEL, Christian et al. *Transformationen gesellschaftlicher Erinnerung. Transdisziplinäre Studien zur Gedächtnisgeschichte der Zweiten Republik*. Wien : Turia + Kant, 2004, pp. 86-130.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the final chapter on European memory in JUDT, Tony. *Geschichte Europas von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. München : Carl Hanser Verlag, 2006, p. 93n.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. LEVY, Daniel - SZNAIDER, Natan. *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter : Der Holocaust*. Hamburg : Suhrkamp, 1993.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. BAUMAN, Zygmunt. *Moderne und Ambivalenz. Das Ende der Eindeutigkeit*. Hamburg : Junius, 1993.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. KNIGGE, Volkhardt. *Statt eines Nachworts : Abschied der Erinnerung. Anmerkungen zum notwendigen Wandel der Gedenkkultur in Deutschland*. In KNIGGE, Volkhardt - FREI, Norbert (eds.). *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*. München : Beck, 2002, pp. 423-440.

<sup>45</sup> Discussion „63 Jahre danach - Kann zum Erinnern ermutigt werden?“, Graz, 19 March 2000. On the project of Jochen Gerz „63 Jahre danach“, see <[http://www.oeffentlichekunststelermark.at/cms/beitrag/11074682/28283838/\\_1](http://www.oeffentlichekunststelermark.at/cms/beitrag/11074682/28283838/_1)>.

<sup>46</sup> YOUNG, James Edward. *Formen des Erinnerns*. Wien : Passagen Verlag, 1997.

of an artist Günther Dennig, within which brass memorial plaques are embedded in the pavements in several European countries, remind of people who had lived in a house and were deported and killed.<sup>47</sup> At the same time the project meets the need to provide an individual commemorative sign as a contrary to physical and symbolic erasing during the regime of National Socialism.

It is exactly the local context where the avowal of responsibility for the crimes of the Nazi regime, as it was done, for instance, by Franz Vranitzky on behalf of Austria in 1991, is transferred from the abstract to the concrete: in this case not only victims have their names and addresses, but also perpetrators who are their own grandfathers and neighbours. The memory of the victims of the National Socialism regime, as well as of other forms of state violence, is, in the local context, inseparably connected with a question who was involved in these crimes. In the local *face-to-face communities*, the memory is constantly a painful process, a conflict potential much stronger and more comprehensive than in the debates of the public media discourse.

### *Memory in "black" and "gold"*

In recent years, negative memory has become a fixed point in the norms of historical reference points, memorial days, commemoration rituals – obviously, besides traditional forms of instilling of national identity by means of positive historical events. "Black" and "gold" places of memory,<sup>48</sup> i.e. historical reference points with positive or negative connotations, focus, however, on different forms of acquiring the past. In case of national holidays reminding of the declaration of neutrality, signing the State agreement on 15 May 1955, as well as commemorations like the Year of Mozart in 2006 or the Year of Haydn in 2009, in the foreground there is a positive connection and the proud of national heritage. Negative events evoke critical dealing with the past of one's own society, parties and state institutions. Who did disappoint in destroying democracy in 1933? Who or which social forces were responsible for the Anschluss of Austria? In Austria, the years 1933/34 and 1938 have repeatedly led to debates and political controversies.

The new forms of negative memory go over and above that. Learning from the past is no longer related only to the nation, but to fundamental moral-ethical questions as well. Why did "normal men" become murderers?<sup>49</sup> How could it happen that people – neighbours, colleagues, schoolmates – just on the basis of their origin and religious affiliation, were humiliated, deprived of their rights and killed? What can be done against racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia? In recent days, 27 January, the day of liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp, and 9 November, the anniversary of the November Pogrom, have crystallized into international commemoration days of the Holocaust. In Austria, it was decided that 5 May will be a Memorial Day of the National Socialism victims. These days, as well as historical sites such as Mauthausen,

<sup>47</sup> Available on the internet: <<http://www.stolpersteine.com>> <<http://www.steinedererinnerung.net>>.

<sup>48</sup> This terminology was borrowed from the book DEMETZ, Peter. *Prag in Schwarz und Gold. Sieben Momente im Leben einer europäischen Stadt*. München : Piper, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. BROWNING, Christopher R. *Ganz normale Männer. Das Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101 und die „Endlösung“ in Polen*. Reinbek bei Hamburg : Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005; WELZER, Harald. *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*. Frankfurt am Main : S. Fischer Verlag, 2005.

Ebensee and Hartheim, provide the society with points of contact for a critical analysis of its co-responsibility for the National Socialism crimes against humanity.

An American historian Jay Winter<sup>50</sup> spoke about the *generation of memory* that is a bearer of the present interest in memory. Maintaining and passing this interest and sensibility to the endangerment of democracy and human rights is probably a central challenge for the present and future engagement in the field of cultural memory. Social mediation authorities and especially schools and teachers have, in this case, an exceptional responsibility.

*This article was published in Kultúrne dejiny / Cultural History, Volume 2, Number 2, © Verbum 2011, pp. 181-192. ISSN 1338-2209*

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<sup>50</sup> WINTER, Jay. The Generation of Memory : Reflections on the Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies. In *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 2000, Vol. 27, pp. 69-92.