

Competing Memories and Moral Claims for Recognition of Victims of Crimes against Humanity in relation with the Holocaust:

an Attempt to Build a Typology of psycho- political strategies.

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Summary :

Memory in general, and the memories of crimes against humanity of the 20th century in particular mark until today European identities and have an impact on intra-national and inter-national relationships. The recognition of past sufferings and memories in the public sphere form an important element for the cohesion of European societies.

The Memory of the Shoah/ Holocaust is in a process of globalization - or universalization -, turning from communicative memory to cultural memory, through the creation of museums and memorial sites, the establishment of memorial days Europe-wide and even world-wide (Stockholm Declaration, decisions of the Council of Europe and the UN), and the establishment of an International task force. At the same time, other memorial claims emerge, such as the demand for recognition of victims of soviet domination in post-soviet societies, for victims of dictatorships in post-dictatorial societies, and for victims of slavery and colonization. Also the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contains a dimension of confronting claims for recognition and competition for victim status.

"Crossed" memory-claims have become visible in various social areas, such as the media, schoolrooms, especially when studying the Holocaust, during memorial days or in memorials and museums; they are often presented by directly involved groups or persons, but may also be claimed by third parties. They seem to be based on psychosocial needs and resentment rather than on historical evidence. What are the psycho-political meanings of these constellations which are involved in claiming, comparing, equating, establishing hierarchies of victims and parallels of genocides?

This contribution aims to discuss possibilities and limits of a typology of competing memories related to moral claims. This typology, based on a psycho-political rather than a legal or a historical approach, attempts to situate the different constellations along two dimensions: the way they refer to same or different historical periods and the way they are located in (same or different) territorial contexts. The resulting differentiation will be useful in finding ways to deal with these strategies, and in addressing them in public debate, educational contexts or memorial events, in a perspective of recognition which avoids equating or banalizing crimes against humanity.

Plan

- 1) Some theoretical assumption concerning memory, globalisation of memory and moral claims
- 2) The need for differentiation of memory claims - an attempt of a typology, and consequences for pedagogical approaches

1) Memory as a factor of social cohesion

- The Memory of the crimes of the XXth century mark until today European identities and have an impact on intra-national and international Relationship.
- Resentments, feeling of humiliation, violence
- Contributes to the lack of social cohesion and attractiveness of right wing discourses

Globalization of Memory

- Institutionalization of global memory as a transnational concept (ITF, UN, CoE)
- Globalization of the memory of the victims
- From the memory of the victorious to the memory of the defeated (Levy/ Sznajder)
- « Heroisation » of the victims (Chaumont)
- The Holocaust = reference for memorial discourses and analysis

Recognition of ones' owns group of memory – a need for a positive identity

- Memory is an important part of identity, it is a duty to honor the memory of the own people - communities of memory (Margalit, Assmann)
- Need for a positive identity, based on the positive evaluation of ones' in-groups (SIT Tajfel and Turner)
- To establish a positive identity comparing, equating, claiming, establishing hierarchies, drawing parallels

2) Typology of interrelated „moral claims“ in relation with the Holocaust

Comparing :

<u>Historical period :</u>	Same period / historical moment: Simultaneity of events, synchronic:	Different period / historical moment. The events follow each others, diachronic :
<u>(National) context place/ territory :</u>		
Same socio-historical and geographical context; groups which live together simultaneous victimization	A	B
Different context, no direct cohabitation of the involved groups, even if they contact through the globalization of memory	C	D

Observations when teaching or discussing about the Holocaust

- ITF - EWG: recommendations on dealing with genocides:
Why, How and What to compare => WHY ?
- Durban conference: Jewish Holocaust and Black Holocaust
- In western European schools school « yes, but why the Jews »,when you see the Palestinians
- In Central Europe: why the Nazis and not the Communists?

Pedagogical approaches

- Who is comparing? Why, what and how to compare?
- Comparing by examining precise historical facts => what is different is more frequent than what is similar
- Every experience is unique. We need to distinguish between comparing crimes of perpetrators, and comparing sufferings of victims: it is possible to scale crimes (hierarchies), but suffering is not measurable nor comparable.
- Importance of context
- Distinction between political debate and educational approach.
- The concern of the public has to be addressed.

Eckmann Monique (2004) *Identités en conflit, dialogue des mémoires. Enjeux identitaires des rencontres intergroupes*. Préface de C. Rojzman,. éd. ies, Genève