

Resonance instead of Alienation: The Practices of Memory Among Migrants and Refugees in the German Culture of Remembrance

Nancy Alhachem, Anthropology

University of Erfurt | Supervisors: Dr. Dr. Jutta Vinzent (Erfurt) / Univ.-Prof. Dr. Katharina Scherke (Graz)

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Topic

This project explores the practices of memory among refugees and migrants (mostly from Arab countries such as Syrians, Iraqis and Palestinians) in light of Rosa's resonance theory. I investigate the obstacles that hinder resonance between the migrant's memory and the Germans' *Erinnerungskultur*, which shapes German national and cultural identity and plays a major role in the interaction between different groups in German society. Coming from countries shaped by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the refugees and the migrants struggle in adopting the German narrative of the Holocaust and the history of National Socialism. This conflict will be investigated by exploring the role of museums and memorials as "resonant spaces" meant to establish communication and exchange, instead of marginalization, competition and eventually alienation. Investigating the migrants' historical backgrounds helps to understand the obstacles that could hinder resonant experiences, such as national ideologies, the Holocaust portrayal in the country of origin, and regional conflicts.

Research Questions

- If Europe is the main 'Lieu de mémoire' of the Holocaust, where is then the place of the refugee/migrant in this national/transnational memory?
- How does the Holocaust remembrance affect the refugee/migrant, and which approach does the latter embrace in comprehending the Holocaust?
- Can the experience of cultural/national trauma trigger resonance, to become a medio-active element of affect?
- Which obstacles may hinder this process or push towards repulsion and alienation?

Sources

I draw on

- the portrayal of the Holocaust in the country of origin
- the effect of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict therein
- literature on alienation, national ideology
- research by Alexander C. Jeffrey, Ron Eyerman, Cathy Caruth, Dominick Lacapra and others
- And especially on Michael Rothberg's theory of 'Multidirectional Memory' and
- Aleida Assmann's 'Dialogical Memory'

Image sources

Left: https://www.canino.info/inserti/monografie/etruschi/etruschi_tuscia/grotta_porcina/index.htm

Right: <https://www.studyblue.com/notes/note/n/wall-painting/deck/13214849>

Aim

Recognizing the need for a new approach to memory and remembrance, I suggest a multidirectional approach to memory, because it allows that different groups enter into dialogue instead of competing over narratives on numbers of victims and the amount of suffering. Cultural trauma is conceptualized as a 'linking experience', allowing for a reciprocal resonance between the migrants on one side and the German society on the other. Hence, the central subjects of my thesis deals with refugees and Holocaust remembrance in the German context: memory and identity in the shades of a country new to the refugees.



Methods

- Participatory observation in new projects intended for refugees at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Buchenwald Memorial (Weimar), and Topf und Söhne Place of Remembrance (Erfurt), among others.
- Qualitative Interviews with refugees and migrants, who are now in Germany.

Next steps

- Developing the historical background.
- Further interviews and improving the sociological methods.
- Participation and collection of field work experience.

Contact:

Nancy Alhachem
University of Erfurt, MWK
IGDK „Resonant Self–World Relations“
nancy.alhachem@uni-erfurt.de

