

How the Strangeness and the Victim End Up in Education:

The Category Gender and Its Relevance in Concepts of Historical Education Regarding Auschwitz and National Socialism in Germanyⁱ

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Germany

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Education in Germany after `Auschwitz´

In the country of the perpetrators 60 years after Auschwitz¹, the education referring to this faces the fact that National Socialism and Auschwitz are more and more seen as a merely historical issue. New studies as well as the public discourse² seem to suggest that family-related remembrance of the victims of the so-called bomb-war carried out by the allied forces and the re-identification of followers, bystanders and perpetrators as resistance fighters is gaining ground. At the same time, the discourse of “coming to terms with history” is dominant for the self-conception of Germany as a fundamentally different country than the Germany of the *Third Reich* and even the acceptance of “negative property”³ has proved to have a unifying effect – by means of a positive as well as a negative reference. Until today those years have shaped

1 The terms `Holocaust´, `Shoah´ or `Auschwitz´ as common metaphors (c.f. Heyl 1997) are all inauspicious. Due to the lack of alternatives and as a member of the German socially stamped memory (Erinnerungskollektiv) I use the term `Auschwitz´. This term is very established in the German educational literature and discussion since Adornos radio speech 1966 (“Education after Auschwitz”).

2 (Welzer 2004: 53-64; 2002)

3 (Améry 2000)

politics in Germany, until today the interpretation of this history keeps changing – History politics remains a hard-fought field⁴.

Because this development cannot be a result of lack of information and education about the historical facts – this lack having been overcome in Germany decades ago - we have to develop new ideas for the education on 'Auschwitz' in order to

1. keep the remembrance alive for the remembrance's sake⁵ and
2. learn one's lesson from the fact that Auschwitz was indeed possible⁶.

Because Auschwitz and National socialism are only going to exist in the narrated, researched and described memories in the futures, it is helpful to envision the question how commemoration - processes are structured.

The commemoration process as an exposure to uncertainties

I generally assume that remembering is part of the human abilities, not a "virtue"⁷. "We do not remember because we are supposed to or because we chose to do so – not for the sake of a categorical imperative, but because we are predisposed, because we do not have the choice not to remember."⁸ Only because of this seeming natural constitutionality of remembrance, the individual, whose memory capabilities are impaired by brain defects, becomes someone whom we call 'disabled' and, that is why amnesias are something out of the ordinary.

"The question of remembering is a question of 'how', not of 'if at all'"⁹ Therefore, remembering is a process which seems to be automatic and beyond our own control - this being the reason for what Ruth Klüger calls tendencies of "transfiguration" and of "remembrance kitsch"¹⁰. Margalit, too, argues that the individual remembering is "in one important aspect (...) >involuntary<"¹¹. In his view, this means in terms of individual remembrance and oblivion that they are not an adequate object for moral

4 (c.f. Klundt 2003: 8) These developments are corresponding with political events in contact with and in relationship to the history between 1933 and 1945, which are e.g. referred as 'oscillation between oblivion and keenness' (Assmann 1999), also see (Brumlik and Rensmann 2000) (Elsässer 1999) (Kunstreich 1999)

5 (Brumlik 1995)

6 Concerning the current questions of „Education after Auschwitz“ and the education in memorial sites of former concentration camps in Germany see: (Abram 1996); (Brinkmann 2000); (Brumlik 1995); (Schreier 1992); (Dudek 1999); (Fechler 2000); (Heyl 1997).

7 (Klüger 1996: 31).

8 (Klüger 1996: 29)

9 (Klüger 1996: 29)

10 (Klüger 1996: 30ff)

11 (Margalit 2000: 38)

and ethical judgments and valuation¹². "If the process of remembering is beyond our control, you cannot praise someone who remembers, or disapprove of someone, who does not"¹³.

That means, that the question concerns the *how* to remember – in this point concurring with Messerschmidt, only emphasizing the aspect of dealing with a *collective* remembrance, and dealing with the question to what purpose collectively remembered history is claimed¹⁴. To the remembrance-process as well as to then memory applies the following: "the most crucial challenge of remembrance is orientation, valuation of the presences. Therefore, each recollection is a subject of the past, but it integrates the past into the symbolic order of the presence."¹⁵

On an individual basis, therefore, something can only be remembered if it is present in a collective and social framework in which the individual participates. "This group-relation is one characteristic of the memory of societies (*kollektives Gedächtnis*). Another characteristic is that the memory always works in a reconstructive way and does not preserve history as such. Events are only re-constructible if there are according to frames or reference in the social presence available. Forgotten is whatever is without place in the present time."¹⁶

On the one side a social framework is necessary as a possibility to remember, however, this won't do it its own; remembering means – especially when it comes to displeasing memories – to realize and to endure tension and contradictions. If this process fails, the neutralization of unsuitable memory is possible:

"Knowing and thinking are two separate things – it is possible to know something without processing it through the process of thinking. (...) By not thinking the known, it is isolated from the flow of life. Who abstains from thinking, can spare the act of forgetting."¹⁷

She does not define experiences as something which is simply remembered and reproduced. "We want to talk about the productive sense of experiences, when the experience is lived as the correction of one's own nourished expectations. (...) If the experience corresponds with reality, the former is confirmed. (...) But if the experience is contradictory to expectations, if it appears as some sort of negation, the experience is actually 'made'. In this negativity of experience, a peculiarly productive sense emerges"¹⁸.

For the remembering process and for the intention to make adolescents detect and endure contradictories, this could mean – from an educational point of view – not to soften historical events or social exposure to make

12 (Margalit 2000: 39)

13 (Margalit 2000. 39)

14 (c.f. Messerschmidt 2003: 7)

15 (Hoffmann 1998: 32)

16 (Kannonier-Finster 1993: 66)

17 (Kannonier-Finster 1993: 69 according to Erdheim 1990)

18 (Kannonier-Finster 1993: 69f)

insecurities disappear. This postulation is mainly directed towards us, the multipliers - who then could not continue to pretend that the confrontation with `Auschwitz` would not pose questions for us and that we had answers - being truthful.

This contains the thought that it is necessary not to lose track of the issue at hand while engaging in all sorts of educational efforts¹⁹, - not to exploit the victims and here fore to rob their dignity.²⁰ Thinking of a commemoration that is not charged with a purpose as well as the simple fact that not everything has to be of direct use for oneself while still making sense, - e.g. remembrance for remembrance's sake- can also be a learning target of this process.

The practical questions

Educationalists that are directly involved in the teaching process of the topic Holocaust and NS are especially faced with the following questions:

- what - of the magnitude of facts, they should convey to the adolescents in order to enable them to put this crime in its right place,
- how they can act beyond the moral pressure what this topic brings along and
- how they can still advance the self-positioning of the adolescents.

In the past, to answer all these three questions educationalists and teachers made recourse to an educational approach, which aims at emotionalizing the subject and thereby trying to generate connectivity with the victims. New educational approaches move away from this, because more and more the problem becomes apparent that adolescents even with out emotional-moral pressure know exactly what they are supposed to say and how their assessment of the events should be - due to some kind of cultural code. Busy with strategies how to get over with a learning situation while securing the best satisfaction of their teachers, it very often remains unclear to what extent there is still room for a real engagement with this issue²¹.

The moralization and emotionalization of the issue - on the surface being a simple method to get the attention and the shock of the adolescents, manipulate the situation in favor of a desired learning process once again. Moreover, it is based partly on the fascination of horror²², putting a visit at a Holocaust memorial on the same level with the consumption of a horror video with friends. Not only the adolescents themselves but also a lot of

19 (Meseth 2003: 7)

20 (Brumlik 1995).

21 (c.f. Hollstein 2002: 167f)

22 (Popp 2002: 6)

teachers react with some sort of disappointment when these shock-pedagogies in addition to the conveyance of knowledge are missing.

A difficult question to be addressed in the context of refraining from this "emotionalizing-pedagogy" and especially with more temporal distance, aims at the right choice of intermediating facts. At the moment, there are more and more new research results concerning the NS time to emerge; especially at the memorials sites in the east of Germany there are more and more items dug out which facilitate an even more sophisticated but also complex picture.

Therefore there is the question regarding the choice of facts covering this time, because the masses of exhibits and publications overstrain the educationalists as well as the adolescents. Furthermore, historical sites as well as found items do not tell the story itself. The visit of memorial sites of former concentration camps and other exhibitions cannot substitute the question of *how* and *what* to teach in the historical context.

If we really want to take education with regard to Auschwitz seriously – in the sense of an "education after Auschwitz"²³, meaning not just teaching pure facts with an emotional spin, we have to confront the fact that Auschwitz was possible within everyday life of average people and their banalities. This results in the question of how Auschwitz was possible being substantially more abstract for the adolescents and us than the feeling that Auschwitz and the years before were an extraterrestrial setting where other rules applied.

The question arises how to teach 'Auschwitz' to adolescents of the forth generation without resorting to images of horror and with the manipulation of learning processes. For next to teaching facts and the remembrance for remembrance's sake, there is the goal to sensitize adolescents to the necessity of being attentive towards oppression and exclusion processes, as well as conspiracy theories and stereotyping. However, this does not have to be done by means of an education on Auschwitz. Because: "There is no such thing as a causal connection between knowledge about the Holocaust and human orientation. Someone who does not know anything about Auschwitz, can very well be aware, that you must not discriminate against or mistreat strangers and weaker individuals."²⁴ But if you use the questions put forward by adolescents with regard to the analogies and the significance for our life here and now, we move in a sensitive area which has to make clear that the past cannot be transferred directly to today while still offering learning issues.

The relevance of gender constructions for remembrance processes

23 (Adorno 1971a: 88; Adorno 1997). (For an analyse on the German reception of Adorno in the educational debate see: Meseth 2000)

24 (Ehmann 2001)

To face the question how to handle this problem, a step back from the practical field to the theoretical conceptualization is necessary, in order to examine the choice of facts, the objects and the methods of teaching in a more general way.

The field being the objective of my analysis is the critical examination of the question, which relevance gender has for the commemoration and teaching process concerning `Auschwitz´ and NS. I hope to show in the following comments that facing this question do have relevance for the future of the "Education after Auschwitz".

In this context, I am not primarily referring to the discussion with regard to the participation of women as victims, bystanders and perpetrators. The women-related research regarding the NS by criticizing the androcentrism in history science and `the disappearance of women in history´ created a valuable basis for different roles, functions and conditions of women in the NS-time and thereby enabled "a self-critical debate with regard to the present time"²⁵. However, for the objective is neither to carry on with the thesis that – put in an exaggerated way – "(German) women were the true victims of fascism" nor is the objective to negate the fact that there were and are clearly anti-Semitic tendencies in the women's movement.²⁶

My thesis points to one level before that: I assume that dominance mechanism and power strategies such as anti-Semitism and racism use the category gender and thereby charge political contexts with sexual connotations. I refer to the category gender, not sex, in order to illuminate the symbolic and construed aspects of this attribution instead of the seemingly natural one²⁷.

I regard the term `category´ as an analytical tool which enables to integrate dominance on all kinds of different levels, its interlacement with other attribution systems and their genesis and effect. I use the term category in the sense that we structure social reality by means of certain order systems on a conscious or unconscious level – including a certain perception of "gender".

Furthermore, I work with a meaning of the category `gender´ that bases on a social interaction process. By means of a communicative exchange of

25 (Kaschuba 2002: 181). At this point, I can't go deeper into the debate of the women-related research.

Compare e.g. (Benz 1997); (Gravenhorst 1997); (Koonz 1991) (Rommelspacher 1998: 102-114; Thürmer-Rohr 2003) (Bock 1986); (Kuhn 1992) (Vrissler 1997) (Eschebach 2002); (Messerschmidt 2003) .

26 (Kohn-Ley 1994); (Jacoby 1990.); (Frauen gegen Antisemitismus 1993); (Rommelspacher 1993).

27 (c.f. Messerschmidt 2003)

To speak about the category `gender´ does neither mean to negate the fact of physical differences between men and women nor socially assigned hierarchies, but to use gender as an analytic category besides categories like `race´ and `class´ (c.f. Hirsch 2002: 206). This means to consider the category gender methodically in the research as a socio- symbolic matrix, which generates cultural arrangements, as a cultural construction and as an effect and sign of power constellations (c.f. Hark 2001: 158) .

its members, this process (re-) builds a changeable symbolic attribution system which is important for the constitution of identities.

In a political context the category 'gender' is especially used to charge settings by using gender images and sexual symbols²⁸. These connections can leave their invisibility behind by introducing the term of 'gender' as a structural category and thereby can be divided to their elements.

The research conducted in the last years offers a lot of evidence for the relevance of the category 'gender' for the remembering process. Leading in this field is the book "Memory and Gender"²⁹ as a collection of contributions which aim at analyzing the relevance and function of the category 'gender' for the process of remembering on an exemplary basis based on pictures, media reports, memorials, myths and narrations with regard to the 'Holocaust'. E.g. the following connections can be found in these contributions and other:

- The association of Jews with some sort of feminization³⁰ and a sexualisation in the ideology and tradition of the German fascism³¹;
- The naturalization of history through the figure of the mother and the representation of children in memorials and as literary characters³²,
- The feminization of fascism as a metaphor of how the German *Volk* was seduced by illustrating historical publications with exulting women³³;
- The infantilisation of the victims and the hyper-masculization of the perpetrators.³⁴

In my view, these results can and should have consequences for the educational work. In order to show in which way this should be implemented, a step back is necessary to point to the relevance, which the category gender has for the perception of *Strangeness* and *Otherness*.

Implementation of strangeness and purity through gender constructs – e.g. in Nazi-anti-Semitism of the early 20th century

Especially when talking about the emergence and the tradition of anti-Semitism, it is possible to find cultural-historical references to an existing connection of images of gender and anti-Semitism with varying degree of importance. These images were the precondition for the idea of the contaminant (*Fremdkörper*) interfusing through symbolic attribution into

28 (Braun 2000: 16)

29 (Eschebach, Jacobeit, Wenk: 2002)

30 (Lentin 2002: 97ff)

31 (Braun 1989)

32 (Hoffmann-Curtius 2002: 363f) (Baumel 2002: 343ff)

33 (Hoffmann-Curtius 1996: 45ff)

34 (Hirsch 2002: 206).

the body and thereby leading to an unchangeable definition thereof.³⁵ This idea was constitutive for the so-called "race thought" of the NS and its political anti-Semitism³⁶.

Anti-Semitism of the early 20th century in Germany resorted to existing gender images, but also created new ones, contradictory ones³⁷. Thereby, a symbolic attribution not only of the evil but also of otherness was constructed, that later even seemed to be more effective by using the category gender. Attributions of pure, apparent beauty and gender-stereotypes transformed into the good, later the Aryan volkish body (*Volkskörper*). The unclear genders, which were created, substantiate the otherness, strangeness, and dangerousness of the enemy and made it visible. By means of sexualization, feminization, masculinization, neutralization and finally de-personification, anti-Semitism got its depth and its attraction and its final transfer into the body became possible.³⁸

Image 1 : 1937 by USHMM Photo archive

Image 2: Bulletin 5/ 2004



*Dolchstoßlegende. Darstellung von 1923.
Quelle: Gold, Helmut/Heuberger, Georg; Seite 268*

A couple of years ago, Klaus Theweleit pointed to the (self-) construction e.g. of the "soldier man" since the First World War³⁹ and the relevance which the defense against each perceived impure, sexual and lively aspect

³⁵ (Omran 2000).

³⁶ (Braun 2000: 40f)

³⁷ (Bereswill 1998)

³⁸ (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund 2003)

³⁹ „Can't you draw a line from the witch to the alluring female Jew, a permanent reality of persecution of the sensuous woman, which can not in the first instance be deducted economically, but from the specific organization of the gender ratio in the men-based law of Europe? (...) The erotic woman is the living inversion of nature; one can feel the closeness of the fascistic ideas of race" (Theweleit 1986: 105)

- for which the construction of the (Jewish) Bolshevik female soldier was suitable - had for the idea and psychodynamics of fascism.

Power and oppression strategies as well as stereotypes require this kind of attribution, in order to clarify, that there is the *other* and *your own*; strangeness and purity, the ideas of *Volk* and *Race*⁴⁰ are symbolized by using them. "In the center of blocking-out there is the prohibition of any kind of commingling."⁴¹

In such a context, the general relevance of homophobia has to be re-thought. Hatred towards everything being different from me is in this context nothing else but the hatred against everything withdrawing itself from norms structured by the category gender.

"Education after Auschwitz"

In case construction processes of foe images like the shown ones are not externalized, learning processes are impeded. The learning processes refer particularly to an understanding regarding the development and power of racism, anti-Semitism and sexism as well. The objective of my thesis is to analyze pedagogic materials from the field of historical education based on the "charged content" of political issues through gender-related pictures and to initiate a process of deconstruction of oppression mechanisms, stereotypes and power structures. Learning through contradictory thinking in the above-mentioned sense is included as well as the fact that through still existing, yet completely different stereotypes familiar to the adolescents, the challenge of making experiences can be asked from them. Or, as put by Adorno: "In this respect, education with the purpose of experience and education with the purpose of maturity (...) are identical"⁴².

An example is the workshop "conspiracy theories"⁴³, in which adolescents are encouraged to "handicraft" a conspiracy around an everyday life situation in an imaginative process - and a jury assesses their merits based on a checklist. This way the first step can be made to detect recent conspiracy theories, such as those concerning September 11.

In the same way, one can imagine the approach to pictures as the ones shown. By discussing the question what it might be in these pictures, that is eerie, strange and memorable and by talking about these constructs, one can follow up the question "How could Auschwitz happen" in one exemplary point. The hope behind it aims at conveying historical knowledge through the process, furthermore at pointing out strings of developments, which enable integration instead of a ripping-apart of the events, as well as being able to be responsive to the needs of the adolescents of finding analogies and demarcations with regard to today.

40 (c.f. Mosse 1998: 204 ff)

41 (Theweleit 1986: 516)

42 (Adorno 1971b: 116)

43 (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund 2003)

An "education after Auschwitz" sure contains much more aspects. Critic of authority and the reinvigoration of the "power of self-reflection, of not-taking part"⁴⁴, however, are crucial elements.

44 (Adorno 1971a: 93)

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Table of images:

Image 1: Cover picture Stürmer 1937, published in the photo archive of www.ushmm.org, US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington

Image 2: >Vor dem Antisemitismus ist man nur noch auf dem Monde sicher<
Antisemitismus und Antiamerikanismus in Deutschland. Bulletin 5/2004. Edited by ZDK und AAS Leipzig 2004

ⁱ All citations own translation