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Remembering pasts: historical-political adult education and remembrance in the migration society

Elisabeth Lang 

Centre for Flight and Migration & Chair of Flight and Migration Studies, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Eichstätt, Germany

ABSTRACT

The idea of one shared past, can develop identity-building potential. Nevertheless, there are diverse memory practices in plural societies and they are an expression of shared, divided, and conflicting memories. The negotiations of (diverse) past(s) and memories and, consequently, related belonging(s) to so-called 'remembrance communities' take place in historical-political adult education. The article explores the relationship between existing historical knowledge about the Holocaust and National socialist past, discursive practices of representation in remembering pasts, and the negotiation of belonging in historical-political adult education. Using the example of a German orientation course, the contribution indicates that (1) remembering is subject to specific social power relations; (2) that teachers and learners navigate in discursive exchange about histories between the (re-)production of national (state) structuring and the attempt to make diversity visible in historical references; (3) that language skills are central for participating in the production of remembrance; (4) that different stakeholders face diverse challenges in teaching and providing historical-political education for adult migrants. The article addresses a relevant and urgent issue in adult education in migration societies. It, therefore, contributes to providing initial insights into teaching and learning opportunities and challenges that arise in courses about the Holocaust and National socialism in migration societies.

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1. Introduction

The idea of a common cultural and historical heritage, a shared history and past, can develop identity-building potential. According to Radonić and Uhl (2016), processes of community building and identity formation, as well as their reassurance, no longer draw their justification and legitimisation from the vision of a joint *future* but from a shared *past* (see *ibid.*, p. 8). However, due to their constructional and processual character there can be no consensus on 'one' history, 'one' memory, and 'one' remembrance (see, e.g. Richter, 2017). Processes of pluralisation make the diversity of histories and memories more visible. Such processes of pluralisation particularly occur in modern, socially, and politically highly differentiated societies often influenced by migration processes. In the nowadays globalised world in which millions of people are *on the move* voluntarily and involuntarily, the question of the relevance of 'one' common past from which communities can draw identity and over which a lot of negotiations and arguments take place becomes increasingly important.

Migration, as a main motor for pluralisation, fundamentally shapes society. Furthermore, it shapes the development of 'complex historical images, memories, and world views' (Georgi et al., 2022, p. 11).

In so-called ‘migration societies’ (see Mecheril, 2016), the ‘perspective on and from history [...] is fractured, narratives are restructured, topics are varied, new things are added, old things are omitted, and the kaleidoscope of historical observation becomes more colourful’ (Georgi & Ohliger, 2009, p. 7). Practices of remembrance are produced both bottom-up (e.g. in the form of local-specific and civil society initiatives and campaigns) and top-down (e.g. in the form of state remembrance practices and policies such as the celebration of specific memorial days and visits of memorial sites by political and civil society actors). Thereby, they are shaped by and embedded in power relations. In these practices of remembrance, there is a struggle for interpretative authority over the past(s), which ‘can lead to the consolidation of hegemonic positions as well as to their destabilisation’ (Radonić & Uhl, 2016, p. 10).

Such hegemonic positions and histories, or so-called ‘*master narratives*’, exist in every society – because identities and communities are formed through them. In Germany, for example, the National socialist past and, thus, the Holocaust is the central reference point in collective remembrance. This is not least due to the state’s acceptance of responsibility for this past as the country that succeeded the National socialist regime. Moreover, – following Germany’s former *Bundeskanzlerin* Angela Merkel’s speech to the Knesset in Jerusalem on 18 March (Merkel, 2008) – it arises from the fact that Holocaust remembrance in Germany functions as a constituting element of the state and society and is regarded as a principle that cannot and must not be negotiated. In other nation-states and societies, other violent past(s) or violent (state) crimes are core reference points for individual and/or collective remembrance, e.g. in the United States, the legacy of slavery; in Namibia, the aftermaths of the German colonial presence; or in Romania, the past and present impacts of the communist era’s repressions.

Consequently, especially in societies which are highly influenced by migration processes and plurality, common, shared, divided, and even conflicting memories develop and emerge (see Lücke, 2016) due to diverse historical references and emphases of different communities. This requires negotiations about what is remembered and what knowledge is actualised and generalised as ‘*worth remembering*’ in the diverse societies and nation-states. Such a processual negotiation and production of past(s) and memories and, consequently, related belonging(s) to remembrance communities takes place, among other things, in formal historical-political education. Moreover, these processes have an impact on educational work. Historical-political education aims at ‘democratisation, action orientation, the capacity for being critical, solidarity, and maturity’ (Hufer, 2017, p. 19). It has the task of ‘providing (historical) knowledge and making skills available which support and expand the ability to criticise, analyse, and act against power relations and discrimination’ (Richter, 2017, p. 24). Historical-political education as understood in this contribution is not solely a synonym for remembrance work but it *can* take place simultaneously. Thus, remembrance work can take place in the context of historical-political education, e.g. by visiting memorial sites. Nevertheless, it can also be, for example, commemorative and protest marches, (social media) campaigns, and (action) art.

In Germany, for example, considered a migration society, many educational offers exist on politics, society, and (contemporary) history by the state, church, or private institutions. In their historical-political education, most of these stakeholders – likewise research – focus on youth education. Fewer programmes are addressing adults explicitly or exclusively. Subsequently, a research desideratum can be identified, which the research project wants to address. Therefore, it tries to capture the specific conditions and framework of *one* particular German educational programme for adults in which histories and past(s) are thematised and discussed in the midst of a migration society setting: the so-called ‘*orientation course*’.

This course is highly formalised and based on the guidelines of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF, 2017). It can be described as a particular programme of historical-political education explicitly for adults. The course aims to ‘impart knowledge of the legal system, culture, and history in Germany’ in order to pave the way for the ‘longer-term goal of integration in Germany’ (ibid., p. 7). Such programmes aiming at providing language skills and certain (civic and historical) knowledge in order to promote migrants’ integration processes can also be found in Austria (‘*language course*’ and ‘*values and orientation course*’), Sweden (‘*introduction programme*’), the Netherlands (‘*civic integration course*’), and Denmark (‘*basic integration training*’).

programme). Therefore, in this paper, Germany as a nation-state and the orientation course as a specific course programme can function – certainly with limitations – as examples of settings in which the question is raised and addressed how to deal with diverse and even conflicting memories, histories, and narratives in relation to a formulated curriculum by the state in formal adult education.

Hence, considering German Holocaust remembrance and adult educational work in the specific setting of the orientation course against the backdrop of the migration society as an example, the following central questions arise: (i) What can be observed in the teacher's and participants' communication and joint (pedagogical) practice about past(s) and histories in an orientation course regarding the participants' heterogeneity? (ii) Which histories are presented in the course beyond a 'German history' (BAMF, 2017, p. 33)? To what extent do 'other' memories and histories find a space to be told and discussed? (iii) Who participates, negotiates, and decides what is remembered and discussed?

Following this, the article wants to explore the relationship between existing historical knowledge about the Holocaust and National socialist past, discursive practices of representation in remembrance – also through 'other' histories –, and the negotiation of belonging to a so-called 'memory community' using the empirical example of a German orientation course. The orientation course functions, therefore, as an example of Holocaust education. Holocaust education – following Werker's (2016) description – is understood as the teaching of (historical) knowledge about National socialism and the Holocaust, the simultaneous commemoration of the victims, and the promotion of democratic attitudes (see *ibid.*, p. 158f.).

Although the research is based on a limited database (see a critical methodological discussion in chapter 4) and focuses on a certain course programme within a specific context, still, it can empirically contribute and be informative and relevant for adult educators working in societies shaped and influenced by (forced) migration processes and plurality. So, adult educators can gain initial insights into teaching opportunities and challenges that arise in such a course due to a high heterogeneity of participants and specific circumstances. Moreover, the paper illuminates negotiation processes of past(s), histories, memories, and belonging(s) in adult educational settings dealing with the remembrance of diverse violent pasts that are or become part of a (more plural German) remembrance culture. Thus, the article contributes to the (international) discourse by blending diverse memories of violent past(s) in historical-political education with education, especially for adult learners. Additionally, it wants to bring together and connect existing theoretical strands of memory studies and adult education. Such a theoretically intertwined perspective tries to create a fruitful synthesis of the different approaches.

Therefore, the article is structured as follows: First, the concepts of knowledge and memory are introduced before looking at the tense discourse of remembrance. Then, in a short excursus, the interdependence of memories, group construction(s), and belonging(s) due to memory is examined in the context of migration society relations (Chapter 2). Then the orientation course's specific setting, aims, tasks, potentials, and challenges as an example of historical-political adult education are presented and (critically) reflected upon (Chapter 3). Afterwards, empirical data from an ongoing study on adult education and remembrance work, specifically: Holocaust education, in the context of an orientation course is presented, and the methodology is critically reflected upon (Chapter 4). Exemplary sequences from the material serve as 'reflection occasions' to address the research questions. Finally, the article ends with a summary (Chapter 5).

2. Memories and belonging(s) in historical-political education: theoretical approaches and concepts

It is remembering or even not remembering that gives meaning to the past(s) for the present and the future. Initially, the practice of remembering presupposes the gaining of specific (historical) knowledge. *Knowledge* can be understood as 'the results of all past subjective and social experiences' (Sebald et al., 2013, p. 15). It includes 'the common, the general, the universal of repeated experiences'. (*ibid.*) In the production and conservation of knowledge,

processes of actualisation, dissemination, availability, and selectivity are challenging: knowledge is only partially pragmatically actualised, the majority of knowledge remains latent and is always linked to the question of ‘which knowledge elements are updated, how, and against what background’ (see *ibid.*, p.16). Knowledge production is closely linked to the question of its meaning for the past, present, and future. Dealing with the past(s) should enable understanding the present world, be a source of values and meaning, and provide impulses for group self-identification and binding strength (see Hroch, 2010, p. 37, as cited in Šubrt & Pfeiferová, 2013, p. 51). Belonging to a group is established through participation in co-creating knowledge, memory, and remembrance (see *ibid.*, p. 54). Such shaping processes have a selective character and refer to a particular relationship between remembering and forgetting (see Sebald et al., 2013, p. 17), which is not least structured by certain power relations.

Therefore, **remembering** is also structured by power relations. It is understood as a social practice produced through interaction and communication. Remembering as a practice is subject to constant (re-)negotiation, is socially and collectively produced and culturally consolidated (Assmann, 2008; Halbwachs, 1985). Accordingly, it underlies constant social change. The visibility of the past depends on various social groups’ prestige, resources, and the power to design and define past(s) (see Fischer, 2019). As conceptualised in this article, remembering is a productive, performative, and selective negotiation process in which social power relations intervene. The social positioning of individuals and groups involved in memory work (co-)decides *who*, *what*, and *how* it is remembered. In remembering, narratives of the past must be continually and repeatedly actualised to not lose their hegemonic status to other constructed versions of the past (see Marchart, 2016, p. 46). Marchart draws attention to the political-cultural-social construction character of past(s). It does not necessarily have to refer to actual event; instead, it can be ‘considered the totality of those discourses with which the community describes itself on its time axis and recognises/constructs itself as an identity’ (*ibid.*, p. 45–46). Past(s) are rather ‘present discourses always constructed through repetitive practices’ (*ibid.*, p. 53). Thus, remembering is not a closed and exclusive process. Instead, it is ‘subject to constant negotiation, cross-comparison, and borrowing’ (Rothberg, 2021, p. 27). Memory can perceive and acknowledge differences and similarities in histories (see *ibid.*) and, consequently, presents itself in a multi-perspective way. In particular, multi-perspective memories can irritate and change hegemonic narratives (see Thomas & Virchow, 2021).

Understanding histories as interwoven and complex is particularly relevant in light of global migration since plural practices of remembering in a migration society are constructed in ***specific conflictive relations of tension***:

(1) First, remembering – especially the Holocaust – occurs within two seemingly contradictory tendencies. These tendencies fundamentally shape the discourse and the struggle for interpretation authority: they range between the universalisation and re-nationalisation of memories.

According to advocates of a universalisation thesis, memory practices are, on the one hand, integrated into a broad and complex field of processes of transnationalisation and globalisation (see, e.g. Cesari & Rigney, 2014; Levy & Sznaider, 2007). National historiography would open up to transnational perspectives because the nation-state would no longer be the exclusive and ‘*natural*’ point of orientation for writing history and the culture of remembrance in modern and plural societies. Histories would be considered and negotiated in their global interwovenness (see, e.g. Beck, 2022). According to Rothberg’s (2021) perspective, different actors create numerous memories through ‘comparison, analogy, acquisition, and reflection’ (*ibid.*, p. 11). Hence, presenting different pasts could shape a plural culture of remembrance and promote a democratisation of remembrance practices and policies.

However, according to Radonić and Uhl (2016), a multi-perspective view of histories could harbour the risk of de-contextualising and de-historicising past events (see *ibid.*, p. 10–14). Therefore, on the other hand, supporters of ‘*one*’ imagined past (re-)produce an under-complex historiography by claiming ‘*one*’ national heritage (see, e.g. Schmid, 2021). According to Welzer

(2010), in times of social, economic, and ecological global uncertainties, such processes would always take place to secure the identity of individuals and collectives (see *ibid.*, 17f.).

(2) Furthermore, there is a politically and normatively heated discussion about the relationship between the fact of the plurality of past(s) and memories and the emphasis on the singularity of historical events. In this debate, the significance of specific histories is negotiated (see Conrad, 2021; Rothberg, 2021); the central question is the singularity of the Holocaust (see Georgi et al., 2022; Lindner, 2022) and its importance as a worldwide reference point of remembrance. The pluralisation of memories by including perspectives that have been less discussed and visible – e.g. colonialism and its aftermath – is often the subject of discussion in the debate about appropriate remembrance in plural societies (see, e.g. Brumlik, 2021; Moses, 2021; Van Ooijen & Raaijmakers, 2012; Zimmerer, 2011). On the one hand, pluralisation processes are welcomed. On the other hand, they are seen as a danger to a consistent national historical (master) narrative, memory practice, and politics (see, e.g. Seidl, 2021).

These fields of tension in the remembrance discourse and the practices of remembering can illustrate that the notion of (national) ‘continuity, closure, and homogeneity’ (Rothberg, 2014, p. 125) is fragile and conflictual in various ways. This results in contradictions when the imagination of homogeneity is confronted with the reality of heterogeneity which is not new even if it seems to intensify under contemporary globalisation processes (see *ibid.*). Therefore, processes of self-assurance and the struggle for constructions of a collective ‘we’ in distinction from ‘the others’ play a central role in memory discourse. Group construction processes form an identity by referring to and assessing the past(s). Belonging to a so-called ‘*memory community*’ particularly and to a community generally is negotiated by positioning oneself and others. These negotiations are shaped by power relations, and not least (re-)produce ethnicising constructions which regulate access to resources such as participation in remembrance.

Therefore, the article refers to a discourse- and power-theoretical understanding of ethnicity. Following Wimmer’s (2008) understanding, nation-statehood is conceived as an aspect of ethnicity. With his conception of ‘ethnic boundaries’, one can illustrate that ethnicity is not pre-existing but rather the product of social demarcations and boundaries. Wimmer defines ‘ethnicity as a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry. This belief refers to cultural practices perceived as “typical” for the community, to myths of a common historical origin, or to phenotypical [...]. In this broad understanding of ethnicity, “race” is treated as a subtype of ethnicity, as is nationhood’ (*ibid.*, p. 973f.).

Collectivising group constructions based on actual or ascribed characteristics of their members serve to reproduce social inequalities, defend power relations, and regulate access to privileges and resources (Attia & Keskinikiliç, 2017, p. 121). For the article, such a power-theoretical understanding of ‘*we-groups*’ construction processes means that certain groups or group members have (more) access to the privilege of visibility and participation (see, e.g. Arieli, 2019; Dolgoy & Elżanowski, 2018; Downing & Carter, 2022); hence, they are visible in the memory discourse and, thus, shape it.

In historical-political education, ‘*we-groups*’ are produced in distinction from ‘the others’ along so-called ‘*natio-ethno-cultural orders*’ (see Mecheril, 2003). This is often done with recourse to constructs such as ethnicity, culture, or ‘*migration background*’ (see, e.g. Cheema, 2019; Georgi, 2003; Gryglewski, 2013; Rhein, 2019). Gryglewski (2020) points out that migrants as holders of various collectively shared memories are still partly perceived as ‘*pedagogical challenges*’ (see *ibid.*, p. 260) since diverse historical narratives irritate the imagined unity of history, past, nation, and belonging – due to ‘*one*’ common, nationally framed past. This recourse to foreignness qua national (state) belonging or non-belonging can lead to unused potentials in pedagogical practice: it could instead reveal hegemonically structured and exclusionary memory practices and policies and thereby make plural perspectives (more) visible.

The mentioned challenges and potentials of historical-political education, as well as the tensions outlined above, are reflected in the pedagogical practice of the BAMF orientation course. The

course will be briefly presented below as an example of historical-political adult education and remembrance before presenting the empirical data.

3. The orientation course as a place of historical-political adult education and remembrance

The BAMF orientation course is part of the so-called ‘*integration course*’ and is subordinated to it. While the integration course mainly wants to teach the German language, the orientation course aims – as already stated – to ‘impart knowledge of the legal system, culture, and history in Germany’ (BAMF, 2017, p. 7.). Both parts of the general course address different groups of immigrants and so-called people with a ‘*migration background*.¹’. In 2020, 21,8 million people of the overall population in Germany (81,8 million) had such a ‘migration background’ (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2022, p. 31). Not all of them are addressed to attend the BAMF integration and orientation course: in 2020, 168,279 persons were (newly) granted access to the course or obliged to attend ([BAMF] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2022, p. 3). This results from the complex regulations regarding access to and participation in the courses.

The German Residence Act defines various rules regarding attendance at and paying for integration courses. As a German national or an EU citizen, for example, one is not legally entitled to attend an integration course. However, the BAMF can ‘permit [one] to attend a course if [the] spoken German is not yet adequate, if [one has] particular integration requirements, and there are spaces available on the course’ ([BAMF] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023b). For foreigners with residence permits issued before 2005, other regulations apply: either one is eligible to participate or is obligated ‘if [one is] receiving the citizens’ benefit (‘*Bürgergeld*’) and [has] been obligated to participate by the office that pays the citizens’ benefit’ (ibid.). If one’s residence was permitted after 2005, similar regulations take place, but in this case, also the immigration office can determine one’s obligation to participate. In a last case, so-called Ethnic German resettlers are legally entitled to an integration course. However, their confirmation of eligibility comes from another federal office, the Federal Office of Administration. In sum, German law defines various groups of addressees with different permissions and obligations formulated by several state authorities. These regulations make clear that not everyone attending a course is there voluntarily or highly intrinsically motivated, but there is pressure and compulsion on the part of the different state authorities. Thus, it can be challenging for participants to manage course attendance, family and care work, daily employment, and homework (see, e.g. [BAMF] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2021; [BAMF] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2020; see for challenges of the concept and curriculum of such integration and orientation courses in Germany and Italy, e.g. Oshodi, 2022; Heinemann, 2017; Ha, 2007). Therefore, the teachers need to find a way to provide and transmit the course content to participants with high and multiple loads; to participants for whom discussing remembrance about the Holocaust and National socialist past might not be the most relevant topic to think and learn about, but to build a new home and living (see for motives attending a course, e.g. Zimmer, 2012).

Besides the participants’ difficult living situations, teachers and learners in the BAMF orientation course are likewise confronted with the chances and challenges of historical-political education and the mentioned fields of tension regarding remembrance outlined in Chapter 2. It can be stated that the stakeholders in organising, providing, and absolving integration and orientation courses, i.e. the state, adult education institutions, teachers, and learners, have – to some extent – different motives and pursue different goals (see, e.g. Beck, 2020 on the motives for (voluntary) participation in the orientation course). These diverse and challenging background situations need to be considered and reflected upon in designing and offering courses for heterogeneous migrant participants – for example, in the orientation courses as historical-political education and further adult educational programmes. This can be relevant, among other things, but especially for the largest provider of integration courses in particular and by far the most important provider of public adult education

in Germany in general: the ‘*Volkshochschule*’ (33,4% of all authorised integration course providers in 2022; see [BAMF] Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2023a, p. 22). For example, in 2020, 385 thousand courses, and out of them, nearly 20 thousand integration courses, were offered by the ‘*Volkshochschule*’ (see Echarti et al., 2022, p. 68 and 81). Beyond that, there are also many other orientation course providers – in total, 1.557 institutions in 2022 (see BAMF, 2023a, p. 22) – for whom the potentials and challenges in educational settings with a high diversity of participants are relevant.

The integration course ‘primarily serves the learning of German language skills, the content taught in the orientation course makes it clear that integration goes beyond mere language acquisition’ (BAMF, 2017, p. 6). The course is intended to ‘make it easier to find one’s way in the new society and [...] create opportunities for identification’ (ibid., p. 7). It aims to ‘impart everyday knowledge as well as knowledge of the legal system, culture, and history in Germany, in particular also the values of the democratic state system of the Federal Republic of Germany and the principles of the constitutional state, equality, tolerance, and freedom of religion’ (ibid.).

The course’s curriculum defines *affective* and *cognitive* learning goals alongside competence development and expansion. *Affective learning goals* are, on the one hand, the positive evaluation and support of democracy and fundamental rights, as well as a constructive examination of plurality and a fostering of tolerance. On the other hand, *cognitive learning goals* are defined as an increase in knowledge in the sense of learning to know and understand facts and contexts (ibid., p. 8).

Especially with the module ‘History and Responsibility’, however, the BMBF connects more than cognitive learning goals but formulates a high demand:

[H]istorical contexts [are] not to be taught in the form of a compendium of facts and figures. Instead, basic historical knowledge of German history forms a bridge for developing an understanding of the German and European present. This is especially true concerning the responsibility for democracy and fundamental rights, which derives to a great extent from National socialist power and the Holocaust. Among other things, responsibility and respect for democratic principles and fundamental rights in the present can arise from knowledge of the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship. (ibid., p. 32)

The understanding of ‘*German*’ history is considered the starting point for taking responsibility for democracy and fundamental rights in ‘*the German*’ present. Thus, taking responsibility for the past is a task for everyone – regardless of one’s migration biography – since from it emerges ‘an attitude of humanity and democratic thinking’ (see Meilhammer & Matthes, 2020, p. 211). Therefore, the orientation course can be understood as a place of negotiation of past(s), memories, and their importance for the present.

From the logic of the BAMF, the appreciation of democratic principles develops (primarily) due to the confrontation with ‘*German*’ history because

immediate comparisons between the systematic persecution and extermination of people under National socialism and today’s attacks on fundamental rights are to be avoided. They relativise the historical injustice and fail to do justice to the democratic and constitutional reality of the Federal Republic. (BAMF, 2017, p.32)

Comparisons between National socialist crimes and contemporary acts of violence must not be allowed. The communicative and discursive negotiation of different histories, or rather ‘avoidance’, occurs under the conditions of those (integration-)political objectives.

However, the curriculum also refers to the possibility of ‘dealing with aspects of migration history in the course’ (ibid.). This shows that the course design nevertheless considers that participants could establish different historical references based on their migration histories and experiences. Since access to and actual participation in an integration and/or orientation course is closely linked to the nationality of the participants, the discourse space in the orientation course is structured along national (state) boundaries from the beginning. Therefore, the thematisation of past(s) and histories is likewise: ‘*The German*’ (national) history is made the starting point and constant point of reference in the curriculum as well as in the communicative exchange about ‘*the*’ past and other pasts in the orientation course.

This is unsurprising, considering that the integration and orientation courses are the German state's central tool for fostering integration processes. Therefore, national state frames of reference seem logical and necessary, as well as content selections, simplifications, and didactical reductions (see, e.g. Siebert, 2009) due to an almost unmanageable variety of possible topics and questions to be addressed. Despite different challenging aspects of the course concept, it is a necessary and creditable programme. It contributes by providing condensed information and knowledge regarding living in Germany for migrant adult learners.

In the following, empirical material will be used to illustrate what a concrete teaching situation can look like aiming to 'teach [...] history in Germany' (BAMF, 2017, p. 6) in order to develop 'responsibility and appreciation for democratic principles and basic rights' (ibid., p. 32).

4. Empirical explorations: remembering heterogeneous past(s)

The empirical material on which this article is based is taken from a broader research project dealing with Holocaust education in the migration society. This broader project deals with the question of how Holocaust education for adults is designed in a migration society. On the one hand, it considers the perspectives of adult (former) participants; on the other hand, it focuses on the perspective of (adult) education providers. The current contribution examines one aspect of this broader research and attempts to approach the core question using the example of the perspectives of orientation course participants. The research applies a qualitative design using document analysis, participating observation, and group discussions (see Bohnsack, 1997). The participating observation was used to analyse the teaching empirically in an orientation course; the group discussion aimed to analyse the students' perspectives on teaching and learning about the Holocaust in an orientation course.

The observation and the group discussion took place in March 2021, when the topics of the Holocaust and National socialism were presented and discussed in an orientation course offered by an adult education institution in Southern Germany. This particular adult education institution was chosen due to former research cooperation. There are some limitations to the applied methodology and data due to the special setting using one empirical case. This needs to be reflected and considered:

First, the research project was introduced and explained at the beginning of the observation. Nevertheless, the author was, of course, visible in the room. With this introduction and visibility, a certain professional role connected with a hierarchical positioning was attributed to the author in relation to the participants. In consequence, the setting and the author in it reproduced specific relations of power and hierarchy, which can affect the actual teaching and participation. Second, the adult learners were invited to participate in the group discussion after the observation. Four orientation course participants from Poland (D1 and D2), Hungary (D3), and Turkey (D4) have decided to take part in the group discussion that was conducted after the regular course day. They voluntarily contributed to the discussion. Nevertheless, certain constraints due to the mentioned hierarchies and attributions must be considered in this context: Participants might feel a pressure or expectation to engage, which could impact wholly voluntary participation. Third, their communication and interaction are permanently performed in a second language which they have (usually) only learned in the last 900 teaching units. Therefore, the data must be presented and analysed against the backdrop of possible language barriers and misunderstandings. Usually, an integration course consists of 900 teaching units (à 45 minutes) aiming at learning the German language. In some cases, adult migrants must attend just the orientation course if they are already fluent in German. In other cases, some participants already have some proficiency in the German language; therefore, they enter the course later and do fewer lessons. Last but not least, the access to the field, the lessons' instructional design, and the discussions were organised under the conditions of the Corona pandemic. Access to the field was challenging as there were hardly any offers on-site. If there were, due to health regulations, adult education institutions did not grant access to the

programmes to the author. In consequence, the presented empirical data in this study can only be considered exploratory and should only be analysed and interpreted in light of the abovementioned limitations. These regulations were taken into account by reflecting the situated nature of the research and, furthermore, the author's specific positionality in several meetings of interpretation groups and research colloquia.

The analysis of the used material and data, i.e. the curriculum of the orientation course, observation protocol, and transcribed group discussion, uses a heuristic content-analytical methodology (see Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022). Besides the group discussion and participating observation in the orientation course, further guided interviews were conducted with former participants in Holocaust education. The adult interview participants had taken part in a public historical-political education programme. These interviews took place in the summer of 2020. Due to the small number of civic education programmes offered in the years 2020 to 2021 as a result of the Corona pandemic, it was not possible to conduct further guided interviews with (former) participants. For this reason, the findings of *this* empirical material resulting from the interviews cannot be included in the present analyses. However, it makes clear that the research design was originally broader in scope and not solely focused on educational offers that exclusively address adult migrants.

Due to the relatively small database, the findings cannot be representative of any programme that addresses adult migrants. Still, they can have an exemplary and explanatory character. Despite the mentioned limitations regarding the universality and representativeness of the research's findings, the setting and interactions described can also be considered an example that can occur in educational settings in other migration societies, but rather in the German context. Due to the high diversity of participants, dealing with it can be challenging in every educational situation. It appears especially relevant in courses and programmes which address migrants from various countries aiming at teaching orientation knowledge in order to '*get migrants integrated*' in so-called '*receiving countries*'.

In sum, the limited empirical data still points to relevant and urgent issues in adult education and can, therefore, contribute to gaining initial insights into which challenges teaching and learning about the Holocaust and National socialism in an orientation course is confronted with. The analysis and interpretations are heuristic and, yet, can highlight first indications and tendencies answering important adult educational questions regarding society's and, therefore, adult education's relation to differences in plural migration societies. Although the study does not provide definite answers, reflecting on the raised question is an essential and significant step.

In the following, using three reflection occasions (1–3) and momentary snapshots (a – e) from the empirical material as examples, the article reconstructs how heterogeneity is dealt with in the course, how histories and past(s) are negotiated in the discursive exchange between teacher and participants, and which potentials and challenges in teaching and learning become visible and relevant in the particular setting of the orientation course.

4.1. Reflection occasion 1: the simultaneity of the (re-)production of national (state) structuring and the visualisation of heterogeneity

(a) In the observed teaching situation, the teacher initiates an interaction about the different narratives of the Holocaust and National socialism. He asks about the educational and socialisation experiences in the different countries of origin of the participants. He uses a national (state) frame of reference to do so. This can be shown by the following questions: 'What did you learn about the Holocaust in Mexico?', 'What is it like in the Philippines?' and 'What is it like in Turkey?' In the teacher's addressing, the individual functions as a holder of '*one*' national history and memory. This approach forces the course participants to speak as representatives of nationally structured memory politics and education and to relate themselves to it. Two participants from Mexico intervene in this notion of a consistent national historical framing of the Holocaust in Mexico and take the

homogenising national addressing into question: They draw attention to the differences in how and what they learned at school. While one participant reports that this topic was not discussed at school, the other contradicts and clarifies that ‘this topic did exist, but not much’. The teacher reacts with a lack of understanding: ‘I cannot understand the differences’.

In this sequence, the teacher’s reaction can be interpreted as a re-orientation to a supposedly homogeneous national (state) frame of reference. This is not surprising against the background of the orientation course’s national (state) structuring as a measure of national integration. Talking about past(s) and educational practice oriented towards this national-state structuring seems likely following the explanations by Wimmer and Glick Schiller on ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002). They describe the self-evident structuring of society by nation states as ‘the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world’ (ibid., p. 301). Conversely, it can be interpreted that the teacher’s national (state) frame of reference was also irritated when the two Mexican course participants drew attention to differences in their knowledge of National socialist history due to heterogeneous educational biographies.

(b) Another sequence in the material also points to the attempt to show differences in educational biographies. Here, the teacher makes this dimension of heterogeneity transparent: The teacher refers to the individual educational biographies of two participants from Turkey when they describe differences in their knowledge. He asks: ‘How did you experience this in Turkey? [...] Did you have this topic in school?’; one participant replies, ‘I do not know, no history’. This, in turn, prompts the teacher to ask ‘which school’ she was visiting. Thus, the teacher highlights the participants’ individual and heterogeneous experiences in teaching and learning about the Holocaust. He points to the plurality of experiences in the discursive space of the orientation course.

In these two snapshots (a) and (b) – both referring to the central question (i) –, simultaneity can be observed: on the one hand, the (re)constructing and referring to a national (state) structure and sometimes processes of homogenisation based on an imagined ‘official’ history; and on the other hand, attempts to make heterogeneous historical references and individual educational biographies visible.

(c) This simultaneity is also evident in the following scene. Here, the relevance of specific historical references is also negotiated: After being directly addressed by the teacher, a participant from Afghanistan reports about the educational contexts in which the Holocaust was addressed in Afghanistan. He says this topic does not occur in ‘primary and secondary schools’. The teacher responds: ‘Afghanistan also has other problems to discuss than German problems’. Later, the teacher also leaves the man’s attempts to establish links between the National socialist past and current events in Afghanistan concerning the Taliban un commented.

Referring to the central question (ii), on the one hand, this can be interpreted as a de-thematisation and avoidance of individual historical references: The teacher stops attempts to draw an analogy. So, the tensions and conflicts between heterogeneous historical references and the demand to teach the Holocaust as a singular event remain undiscussed and latent. There is no open exchange about this conflicting relationship. The teacher maintains the teaching about ‘German’ history and does not open up any space for comparative reflection and multi-perspective remembrance of historical and contemporary events. Still, the de-thematisation is not a surprise since teachers receive their teaching mandate from the state authority BAMF, which – as described above – clearly express that direct comparisons and references are to be avoided. The teacher, thus, follows his pedagogical mandate within the framework of the formalised and curricularly defined setting: The BAMF has to define specific and selected historical content to be addressed and discussed in the course. The desire and attempt to make diverse references to past and present events visible and tellable seem to reach their boundaries in educational practice here. These content and thematisation limits are set by the nation-state and implemented by the teacher.

On the other hand, the teacher’s reference to challenges within society in Afghanistan can also be interpreted in the way that he is at least aware of the specific contexts in Afghanistan and,

consequently, different references to narratives of the past and the present. The teacher acknowledges the relevance of current violent conditions in Afghanistan and, at the same time, the subordinate importance of German history for the course participant. Therefore, the situation can also be interpreted as a relief of the individual from specific knowledge and memory claims made by a '*majority society*'.

Considering the above described (re-)productions of national state frames of reference (a-c), it must be stressed that – solely as an example – the teacher's reactions to the teaching situations must be thought of as spontaneous. Therefore, the promotion of simplifications and stereotypes occurs likely as an unintentional effect and is not necessarily the teacher's intention. On the contrary, the teachers in the BAMF integration and orientation courses for sure, try to do their best: therefore, the observation material must be analysed and interpreted in light of the little time – only six units in total – the teachers have available for teaching about National socialism and its aftermaths in Germany and Europe, and, in view of the fact that they are mostly underpaid and overworked freelancers (see Echarti et al., 2022). For example, in 2022, 175 thousand part-time or freelance course teachers in and beyond the orientation courses were paid by the '*Volkshochschule*' (see ibid., p. 27). The association of three other large organisations in the field of adult education reports about 52,000 additional forms of employment as part-time or freelance (see Horn et al., 2023). This results in often stressful, tense, and difficult working contexts – not least due to teachers' professional background, (limited) further professional training,² and, thus, systematically precarious situations.

(d) The relevance of historical knowledge and different historical references can also be found in the communicative exchange of four participants during the group discussion. The empirical material shows the negotiation of this question of relevance in the construction of '*we-groups*':

D2³: I think if you want to live here in Germany, it's important. I don't know how much information you need to know, but knowing a bit about history and politics is okay. [...] But I'm not sure if all the information is important. It's too much for different [people]. For the people who come from Europe [...], it's okay. We understand it very well. However, I guess the people who come from Africa, for example, // D4: Turkey. // D2: Ah, or from Turkey, that can be too much, and they might not understand so well what happened. [...] // D1: I think for you [addressing D4] it's not interesting, you know? [...] You care about what is forbidden here, what is allowed. [...] I know the history. // D2: Yes, for me – we [turning to D1] are from Poland – it's nothing special. We know the history.⁴ (GD1, 12–20)

Course participant D2 raises the question of what should or could be known by whom regarding '*German*' history and politics. On the one hand, she refers to her comprehensive knowledge ('We know the history'. (GD1, D2, 20)); on the other hand, she indicates that there can be differences in knowledge about '*European*' history ('[...] for the people who come from Africa, this can be too much [...]') (GD1, D2, 12f.)). Furthermore, participant D1 assumes a less high relevance or a lack of interest in the topics of history and politics by the non-European '*others*' in distinction to a knowing '*us*'.

Once again – addressing the central question (ii) –, recourse to national (state) memberships with, at the same time, recognition of different educational backgrounds can be illustrated. Moreover, a link between nation-statehood and a supposedly different attribution of meaning to '*European*' history for the imagined '*others*' becomes evident: For Europeans, National socialist history is familiar and relevant; for migrants from non-European countries, neither the one nor the other. On the one hand, this can again be interpreted as a relief of knowledge and memory claims for non-European participants. On the other hand, the link between national (state) belonging and the relevance of historical events can also indicate that a '*we*', which possesses specific historical knowledge and remembers, tries to exclude '*the others*' from an (imagined) community of remembrance or even responsibility due to deviating or missing knowledge. Such exclusions might aim to avoid that imagined uniform European remembrance becoming irritated due to plural narratives and, therefore, becoming more complex and fragile.

Such exclusions of people harbouring different narratives on the past would, following the BAMF (2017), be linked to a specific problem: a lack of a shared historical canon of knowledge

from which individuals are excluded, and along with it, a possible loosening of consensual memory could harbour the risk of individualisations of history and, consequently, relativisations of ‘historical injustice’ (ibid., p. 32).

(e) In another snapshot sequence, participant D4 reaffirms the linkage of different national (state) memory and education policies with particular knowledge. Nevertheless, he also intervenes in them:

D4: [...] normally, we only learn our history in Turkey, but not about Germany or Europe. Turkey is only a small part of Europe, that’s why we mostly learn Ottoman Empire, and that’s why we learn very little about European history or German history. And yes, sometimes it’s difficult, but for me, it’s okay. [...] If you didn’t learn anything about it at school, you can hardly understand it [...]. OKAY, I understand, I studied, I studied business administration and learned a bit of politics at school and university. BUT if you only have a secondary school certificate, it’s too difficult. (GD1, 21–25)

D4 also uses national (state) structuring to legitimise non-knowing and non-remembering. In addition, he points to the importance of individual educational biographies and social status. He emphasises that he would ‘understand’ in distinction from ‘*the others*’ because he had ‘been to university’, whereas to understand was ‘difficult’ for those who ‘only had a secondary school diploma’ (GD1, D4, 21–25). His statement highlights a socio-economic dimension. D4 constructs orders of belonging and social hierarchies based on educational qualifications: D2 also studied and worked as a teacher in her country of origin. She underlines this in the discussion. Hence, D4 can find in her person a motive for constructing distinctions that make him a member of a ‘*we-group*’ with a university degree. He emphasises his university qualification and, thus, his belonging to distinguish himself from the non-knowing ‘*others*’ with deviating historical references. This quote can be interpreted that he wants to actively counteract national (state) structured processes of exclusion.

In summary, the material also contributes to the central question (i) and shows evidence of diverse ‘*we-group*’ constructions either along national (state) or socio-economic reference frames.

Especially the last frame of reference represents another central aspect of the exchange in the orientation course: The actual participation of the participants in the course depends on socio-economic backgrounds, i.e. educational biographies and language competencies in German.

4.2. Reflection occasion 2: language and remembrance participation

The empirical material repeatedly contains references to the topic of German language proficiency and the question of which role existing language skills in German play in participation in the orientation course.

D4: Some of them have B1 level, but [...] on average, we have A2. We learn history like this; it’s like reading a thriller. [...] Some people come from Europe, and these people already know the history, German history or what happened, Second World War and First World War. [...] But (laughs) many come from Africa and Turkey, also Afghanistan, Pakistan. They have no idea what is happening here. [...] I think the first problem is language difficulties. Maybe MANY want to say something or refuse or accept,⁵ but (laughs) because of the language, unfortunately, they can’t [...]. (GD1, 156)

As described above, D4 draws attention to the different existing historical knowledge that course participants ‘learn at school’ (GD1, D4, 153). On the other hand, he does not focus exclusively on historical knowledge or non-knowledge in the sense of belonging to the ‘*memory community*’. Still, he points to possibly low language skills in German as a reason for the lack of participation in shaping the memory discourse in the orientation course. The linguistic level seems too low to understand the contents of politics and history: ‘Then you need at least B2 level, not B1 or A2’. (GD1, D4, 156)

It becomes evident that in the setting of the orientation course – with its specific objective and mission – language is one of the central moments for participation in education and, thus, in remembrance. As a result – referring to the central question (iii) – those who can speak sufficiently in the German language can participate, negotiate, and discuss what is thematised and remembered. Therefore, it is not only the tensions mentioned above between questions of plurality and singularity of histories that influence and structure pedagogical speaking and acting in the orientation course. It is not shared or divided knowledge and memories that become the reference point of ‘*we-group*’ constructions. Instead, the challenging task of acquiring German language competencies and historical knowledge in the integration and orientation course is central for both the teacher and the participants; since the learning processes within the course are interconnected with different possibilities and abilities to cope with the difficult learning setting in the course. This challenging task and how to deal with it will be discussed in the following.

4.3. Reflection occasion 3: ‘integration’ through knowledge (reproduction)? Challenges of a functionalistic setting

Beyond addressing the three central research questions (i – iii) and despite the limitations of the empirical data, during the analysis the material revealed a further interesting and relevant field of tension: the nexus of high pedagogical expectations regarding the participants’ ‘*integration*’ by ‘*learning*’ democracy in a highly functionalistic setting. The course participants are expected to develop German language skills, gain historical knowledge, ‘*learn*’ democratic attitudes, and prove this by passing two tests. This challenging task creates occasions for solidarity between the course participants. After all, ‘the goal is for everyone here [...] to pass B1’ (GD1, D3, 165). The goal is to complete the course successfully, ‘just learn this language a bit and find a job [...] and live here’ (ibid., 42).

There are differences in such personal motives for participation and the official (integration) goals of the BAMF: 58% of the 634,255 persons with access to an integration course in 2022 (BAMF, 2023a, p. 3f.) did not participate voluntarily but were obliged to do so by the basic income provider or the foreigner authority. Successfully completing the ‘German Test for Immigrants’ and the ‘Living in Germany’ test is therefore linked in most cases to securing benefits and/or granting a residence title. The empirical material shows that the teacher makes an effort to prepare the participants in the course so that they can complete the tests. This becomes concretely visible in the division of the didactic-methodical design of the lessons: On the one hand, (new) content is taught, and on the other hand, possible questions from the ‘Living in Germany’ test are discussed and answered. Against the background of a – as already mentioned – necessary didactic reduction (see Siebert, 2009), the teacher is confronted with the challenge of reducing the complexity of historical content and contexts in favour of reproducible knowledge for the tests.

In consequence, and as an additional finding independent from prior considerations, a complex field of tension opens up between the politically formulated demands on the pedagogical work in the orientation course and its practical limitations: On the one hand, the primary goal of integration is to be achieved by the participants gaining German language skills. Secondly, in order to be considered ‘*integrated*’ in the sense of the BAMF, it is necessary to impart historical knowledge of the National socialist past while at the same time accepting responsibility for democracy and fundamental rights; and – following the BAMF – fostering democracy as a task results from the recognition and appreciation of the special significance and singularity of the Holocaust. Simultaneously, there are attempts to take into account the plurality of perspectives and make heterogeneous historical references visible.

On the other hand, the setting of the orientation course requires a didactic reduction of the complexity of histories to make it possible to pass the test successfully. Within this setting, both teacher and course participants navigate between the requirements of language acquisition,

functionalist knowledge acquisition, dealing with diverse perspectives, and forming a 'positive assessment and support of democracy and fundamental rights' (BAMF, 2017, p. 8).

This raises the follow-up questions – to be addressed in further future research – of the suitability of the didactic approach and legitimacy of the extensive didactical reduction of learning content. The question arises of how much content can be reduced without reducing historical and political complexity but still addressing the task of '*integration*' by fostering democracy and fundamental rights.

As interwoven and tense as the discourse of remembrance is in the areas mentioned earlier, the practical adult educational work in the orientation course, as outlined in the examples, is challenging, in part overtaxing, and stressful.

5. Summary and conclusion

Considering the central research questions, the issues and tensions of the complex research field outlined above, and the empirical material, it can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Remembering occurs within the horizon of social relations of power and hegemony. Different actors, such as the BAMF, teachers, and adult learners, construct memories and past(s), tell, but also leave out histories and stories with different purposes (central question (ii)).
- (2) In the presentation and thematisation of historical events in the orientation course, on the one hand, group constructions and (re-)productions of (national) collectivisations, even homogenisations, by the teacher and the participants can be observed when they make nationally imagined and partly stereotypical unities the orientation framework of their practice and communication. On the other hand, there are attempts to make heterogeneity, plural, and individual historical references, as well as diverse educational biographies, visible to create belonging and solidarity. Both dynamics manifest themselves in their simultaneity. Given the national (state) structuring of the orientation course, it is remarkable that group constructions can be found in the empirical material not based on *ethnicity* but on the category of *class* (central question (i)).
- (3) Furthermore, language skills are shown to be significant competencies in participating in education and remembrance in the specific setting of the orientation course (central question (iii)).
- (4) Finally, a tense field opens up between memory policies, political demands regarding integration, and pedagogical practice with its limitations: On the one hand, 'responsibility and appreciation for democratic principles and fundamental rights in the present' (BAMF, 2017, p. 32) are to be accepted and acquired by migrants through participation in an orientation course; on the other hand, specific language competencies and historical knowledge are to be reproduced and demonstrated as indicators of '*integration*' in the sense of the BAMF. These tensions are evident in pedagogical practice and find a place of negotiation there.

Historical-political education for adults should address this complex field of educational and remembrance work empirically and theoretically informed. Therefore, multi-perspectivity in remembrance should be integrated into theoretical considerations regarding historical-political adult education about the Holocaust and National socialism in migration societies. In both fields, memory and migration studies, one central point of reference is the production of *belonging* to a group. Not unusually, in educational work, a national (state) frame of reference is used for this purpose since it enables one to think, speak, and act within a specific and well-known structure and simultaneously opens possibilities for identification with one another in an often (still) unfamiliar environment. Still, this frame of reference must

be considered and reflected theoretically and practically. Such reflections include an understanding that the preconditional mobilisation of nationally identified ‘*we-group*’ constructions should not cause any inadmissible collectivisation. According to Messerschmidt (2016), in the ‘context of a society of diverse belonging, migrations, and globalisation [...] diverse relations to history can be articulated without having to establish national identities’ (ibid., p. 20). Following this, historical-political education in the orientation course needs openness to different historical knowledge and, thus, memories and negotiations. This is specifically relevant because of the particular and/or universal relevance of different pasts in present migration society worldwide. Multi-perspective remembrance can be achieved by allowing references between different historical and social contexts and, at the same time, counter-acting inappropriate equations. Therefore, reflective references and criterion-guided analogies are necessary at the challenging and still fruitful intersection of memory studies, migrations studies, and adult education.

Furthermore, the proposed approaches to the complex research field require additional systematic research to achieve a more differentiated general picture of how the tensions in the discourse of remembrance manifest themselves in historical-political adult education on the Holocaust and National socialism. Therefore, to gain further results and verify and strengthen the given initial findings, a broader and more representative database, hence, an empirical saturation is needed since the available insights from the research using exemplary empirical material are of a preliminary exploratory character.

Notes

1. The definition of ‘migration background’ – following the Statistisches Bundesamt (2022) – is: ‘A person has a migration background if he/she or at least one parent does not have German nationality by birth’. This definition includes the following persons: ‘1. immigrated and non-immigrated foreigners, 2. immigrated and non-immigrated naturalised citizens, 3. ethnic German resettlers, 4. persons who have received German citizenship through adoption by a German parent, and 5. children born with German citizenship of the four groups mentioned above’. (ibid., p. 5).
2. The approval of teachers in an integration course includes (1) a successfully completed degree in German as a foreign language or German as a second language or an equivalent professional qualification recognised by the Federal Office; (2) German language skills at least on level C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages; (3) a professional qualification sufficient to teach the contents and objectives of the orientation course; (4) personal suitability for teaching the contents and objectives of the orientation course. However, from February 2023 to June 2024, additional special regulations apply to simplify the admission as a teacher in courses due to the enormously increased demand for integration and orientation courses. Therefore, the training and preparation for teaching in the courses are not always linked to sufficient qualifications or adequate competencies of the teachers. Thus, teachers’ admission is often based on high demand and necessity. See <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Integration/TraegerLehrFachkraefte/LehrFachkraefte/ZulassungLehrkraefte/ZulassungIntegrationskurse/zulassung-integrationskurse-node.html>
3. In the transcription and analysis of the underlying study, codes were used to distinguish between the participants in the discussion. ‘D2’ is used for anonymisation and stands for ‘discussant 2’. Additionally, the acronym ‘GDI’ stands for ‘Group Discussion 1’. The quotations taken from the transcriptions are indicated with section references.
4. While the interpretation of the empirical material was systematically guided using the original text, the interview passages in this article were edited linguistically for better readability. Furthermore, the aim was not to create a ‘*demonstration effect*.’ The discussion participants come from different backgrounds and have different language competencies in German as a second language.
5. ‘Accept’ and ‘refuse’ are interpreted in this context as ‘agreeing’ and ‘disagreeing’.

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ORCID

Elisabeth Lang  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4593-1621>

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