

WG2 Reflecting Remembrance in Human Rights Education and Training

I am an historian, with a particular interest in historiography and the questions of memory and forgetting, and of the politics of heritage and national identity.

My take on the topic of this Working Group, slightly reframing it, is this:

What does the question of history and memory, of memory politics, and of remembrance bring to our focused discussion on Hate Crime and ways forward in combating hate crime?

The focus and perspective of my answer is intended as complementing and adding an additional dimension to the those brought by the other speakers in contributing to our discussions and the task of

- i. conceiving the relevance and role of history, memory and remembrance to the work of our conference
- ii. how it can inform the elaboration of concrete and practical proposals in this WG's discussions.

A first response to the ' Guiding Questions' outlined for our panel may help situate the perspective developed here. Thus:

- "it is necessary to remember the breaches of those principles [the fundamental values on which the European Union is built] caused in Europe – and to learn from them"
I would strongly contend that 'breaches' *in Europe* is not encompassing enough.
- "Learning from the past", or "acknowledging victims of discriminatory crimes of the past" to prevent crimes in the future
is certainly important, but it is not explicit enough about (what Jeff Spinner-Halev calls) 'enduring injustices' that are not confined to the past or merely in danger of emerging again in the future but rather endure in the present;
- "remembering mechanisms of past atrocities" for understanding and preventing hate crime in the present and future
is equally important, but I'd like this session to also bring other dimensions of history and memory of relevance to combating hate crime, with a focus on what such approaches leave out

I want to argue for three things:

1. Bringing into the narrative of Europe's history Europe's colonial violence outside the continent; and into the imaginary of Europe's present the diasporic and transnational memoryscapes that traverse it;
2. A more encompassing history of the post WWII period which acknowledges racial terror and violence as not far from the daily lived experience and living memories of post-colonial migrant and settler ethnic minorities in Western Europe;
3. Recognition of the continuum of racialised entitlement that underwrites much of its discourse of belonging that renders difference as conditional citizenship and always precarious belonging.

1. Europe is a dynamic, fluid and evolving, living ensemble of social -- no less than political and institutional-- relations on the ground, made up of memories and aspirations, noble ideals and everyday practical survival, of individual and collective nightmares and dreams, not all of them configured by its current (and in any case always shifting) geography, nor, for that matter, sharing the same narrative periodisations, let alone interpretations, or centrality to dominant public narratives and institutional recognition and memorialisation nationally or at European Union level.

Europe is not an essence but a project, and its memoryscapes are traversed by the two way diasporas and transnationalisms which cross its borders.

We need to think here less of shared memories and narratives –and even less of imposing unitary shared memories and narratives as a normative standard of attained civility and conditional citizenship— and more of a way of recognising the role of memory and memory politics in articulating those differences in ways that bridge convivial living together and acknowledge ‘multidirectional memory’ -- the way that memories rearticulate and build on other memories rather than as competitive victimhoods (Rothberg).

Reconciliation in the space and among the peoples that make up Europe, is not only about Europe or atrocities in Europe, and both the histories of colonialism and post-colonial settlement and migration, multi-ethnic empire and nation building weave different usable pasts to different imagined communities.

Similarly, the different political geographies (including imagined geographies) and histories of the continent, make for very different experiences of dictatorship, occupation, atrocities and persecution.

In both respects we could productively follow the lead of two approaches in the relevant literatures:

One, is the approach that bring together the literatures on transitional justice and on multiculturalism through the lens of justice and reconciliation on the recognition that “it makes little sense to discuss the projected societies after transition without the inclusivity which is the focus of politics of difference, or of diversity and pluralism abstracted from historical injustice”.

In this respect, Bashir Bashir’s examination of the politics of reconciliation usefully identifies three principles:

- Voicing the collective memories of exclusion;
- Acknowledgement of historical injustices;
- Taking responsibility and offering an apology

Of particular interest to our discussion is his emphasis on the activities into which such acknowledgement must translate particularly at the pedagogic level, by which he means a broad compass of the inscription of more inclusive narratives and performances of inclusion in the public narratives and spaces which structure and embed senses of belonging and recognition.

Drawing on Michael Billig’s notion of ‘banal nationalism’, and its refocus away from hot nationalism to its everyday forms of its routinisation, it would be worth extending the compass of Bashir’s performative acknowledgement even further from the ritualised occasions to its everyday reproductions.

Another, is approaches that restore the articulations between Decolonization and the Holocaust in European and Global responses to the making of contemporary discourses of memory and history post 1945 (multi-directional memory):

- Not merely of historical dates but of historical context

- Specifically how the imperialism and the Holocaust were integrated as both integral to European history; and how the Algerian war shaped and wove together articulations of responses to both

2. The role of “remembering mechanisms of past atrocities” to understanding and preventing hate crime in the present and future.

The assumption and focus is on legacy of exceptional crimes, but this session on history and memory is the only one in the conference, we need to think of history and memory in ways that connect with the themes, analysis and understandings of hate crime raised in other panels, namely attention to

- I. the everyday and routinized experiences of racism and racialised exclusion and violence
- II. the understanding of hate crime as process, rather than incident, as socially structured rather than psychological or pathological

Specifically:

Of (ii) the understanding of hate crime as process, rather than incident, as socially structured rather than psychological or pathological:

The most prevalent of these being racial Entitlement (by blood nationality) vs precarious and always ideologically conditional belonging of citizenship (the very concepts of second generation third generation immigrant perpetuate the foreignness).

Of (i) the everyday and routinized experiences of racism and racialised exclusion and violence:

Histories of racialised violence are most certainly not part of national stories, but they are not even part of most works with a claim to being histories for the educated or used in education.

The problem is that seeing violence as the aberrant and exceptional creates amnesiac perplexities about historical injustices, grievances and assumptions, and a blindness to deeply structured inequalities. It also perpetuates differential –indeed clashing--memories of abstract ‘core values’ held by the majority and the lived experience of (their violation) among the minorities.

In particular, perhaps, we need to consider how the everydayness of such prejudice, as Gyanendra Pandey argues, places it outside history and its archive, and what implications this has for the FRA commitment to History based and Memorialisation based education and sensibilisation to human rights.

FRA materials on sites of memory and museums rightly focuses on the pedagogical advantage of original documents and testimonies and authentic objects, but we need to broaden the scope of sites of memory and historical sources to the affective and political narratives of grass roots communities, especially ethnic minority communities marginalised from both state and civil society archived narratives, and lacking institutionalised documents but not, of course, transmitted memories and informal sites of memory.

A fundamental principle is not to see the violated as passive victims of violence.

In this respect, it is crucial to cultivate a ‘sociological imagination’ which fosters the sense of all communities as being ‘makers of history’: this means the ability to connect both individual biographies with historical and social structures, and private injury with dominant social narratives and public justice.

In this regard, we should go back to the point about the inscription of more inclusive narratives and performances of inclusion in the public narratives and spaces which structure and embed senses of belonging and recognition, with the following in mind:

‘They never let you forget their history, but they want you to forget yours. Is it so painful for you to think what you have done to us? Do that bother you? They don’t have us in their history books. They don’t tell you what you contributed to this country. When your kids read a book, you would think that nobody did nothing in this country except the white man.’ (Maggie Holmes, African American woman interviewed by Studs Terkel for his oral history book on race in America)

To conclude with a challenge to the FRA:

FRA’s published Opinion on the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia, includes among its recommendations:

“Action 13: EU Member States should examine how education about the Holocaust and other crimes committed by totalitarian regimes is integrated within human rights education and history curricula. They should also assess the effectiveness of teaching on these subjects.”

This is unquestionable. But should not a recommendation in respect of the histories of imperialism, colonialism and the histories of racism and racial violence and exclusion also form a part of history curriculum for human rights education in a multicultural and postcolonial Europe?

FRA urges EU states to draw on its publications and reports on the practices of Holocaust education and the role of Holocaust Sites and Museums to ‘preserve the memory of crimes committed by totalitarian regimes in Europe in order to strengthen human rights awareness in today’s society.’

Three points about these:

Consider the FRA *Handbook for Teachers ‘Excursion to the Past – Teaching for the Future’*

- The section on patterns of continuity highlights the importance of the history of theory and practice which leads to the holocaust, including a section titled ‘racism’ which makes a brief reference to biological ideas of racism, yet it makes no reference to imperialism;
- Take the section on Human Rights Education which provides a Timeline with a Focus on Europe. It reads:
‘There is a long history of developing, strengthening and enforcing human rights – a history with many setbacks and many challenges ahead. ‘
“Our timeline begins in the 18th century in Europe – the century in which the philosophers of the enlightenment tried to found societies based on democratic principles, which guaranteed equality before the law to their citizens. All these principles were developed in the interest of allowing people to develop their full potential.”
There is a Danger of here of merely replacing one whitewashed history for another: a version of human rights championed by Enlightenment thinkers as seemingly universal and fraternal in scope, passing in silence the questions of slavery, slave owning (John Locke), and racial categorisation (Kant).
- There is, more generally, a missed opportunity of considering multicultural and diverse classrooms and how to connect these histories

Telling, in the FRA Handbook for Teachers, the one point that is made about connecting and drawing in the multicultural classroom is asking ethnically marked pupils about persecution in their home countries! (again nothing about histories of racism and exclusion in Europe, or Europe's historical legacies overseas).

I close with an example of **Connecting Struggles and drawing lessons of the past alert to challenges of the present, old and new:**

The following letter appeared in British newspapers last week to mark the 75 years of Kristallnacht:

[...]Many Jews left hurriedly to seek refuge in friendly countries, including Britain, but Britain was already in the grip of an "aliens scare". Newspaper headlines declared: "Alien Jews pouring in", and claimed that "Refugees get jobs, Britons get dole". The media accused Jewish asylum seekers of "overrunning the country". Despite wide public revulsion at the violence of Kristallnacht powerful elements in British politics and business continued to admire Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Seventy-five years after Kristallnacht, racists and fascists inspired by the Nazis continue to attack minorities in Europe. In Hungary neo-fascists target Gypsies and Jews. In Greece Golden Dawn members and supporters brutally attack migrants and political opponents. Here in Britain, minority communities, especially Muslims, have been targeted in an atmosphere that is increasingly hostile towards migrants and refugees.

Mindful of this history, we are equally alarmed at continuing fascist violence and the toxic sentiments expressed by many politicians and much of the media against migrants, asylum seekers, Gypsies and Travellers. We stand shoulder to shoulder with migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in their efforts to live here in freedom and safety, to contribute to society and be treated as equals. As Jews we stand together with all communities seeking to combat racism and fascism here and elsewhere.

On Open Democracy net, the letter was accompanied by an illustration (of a headline from the Daily Mail, Saturday 20 August 1938). It requires no further spelling out of its contemporary echoes, and I invite you to think of it as an example to follow in our work:



References:

Jeff Spinner-Halev, *Enduring Injustice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012

Gayanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste and Difference in India and the United States*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013

Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009; also Michael Rothberg; for open access related writings by the author see: <http://michaelrothberg.weebly.com/essays.html>

Bryan Cheyette, 'Frantz Fanon and the Black Jewish Imaginary', in Maxim Silverman ed., *Frantz Fanon's Black skin, White Masks*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, pp. 74-99

Maggie Holmes, interviewed by Studs Terkel, in *Race: How Blacks and Whites think and feel about the American Obsession* (1992), p.146 [previously published as 'Under Our Skin', by Studs Terkel, in *Mother Jones* May-June 1991, pp.36-45 (44), also cited by René Lemarchand in his Introduction to *Forgotten Genocides: Oblivion, Denial, and Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991, p.17, citing from Colin Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy: Reflecting on Genocide* (NY: Verso, 2003, p.142).

Kristallnacht letter signed by David Rosenberg and 212 others:

The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/nov/08/kristallnacht-threat-racism-fascism>

The Independent: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/letters/letters-nazis-are-history-but-toxic-hatreds-live-on-8927538.html>

Open Democracy net: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/david-rosenberg-and-212-others/75-years-after-kristallnacht-minorities-in-danger>

Will Kymlicka and Bashir Bashir's *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

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