

Workshop 3: Teaching and Learning about Perpetrators in Multi-Ethnic and Migration Societies

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“Reflection on Perpetrator Guilt – history education and political education in an immigration society”

1. After-effects of National Socialism on the immigration society of Federal Germany

The views of the world and of humanity that became ideologically established under National Socialism continue to affect contemporary German society. In particular, they manifest themselves in the self-perception of a homogenous national community. This perception implies that Germans can be neither Jews nor blacks nor Muslims. On this basis, migration and internal heterogeneity as part of German history are rejected and suppressed, resulting in the development of an ambivalent relationship towards migrants. On the one hand, they are denied the chance to belong, while on the other hand, they are expected to integrate totally, and to provide proof of this integration through a morally clear stance on National Socialism. In the process, it is implied that German society has already completed a collective clarification with regard to the ideological foundations of persecution and extermination. There is a need in education work for a reflection on social relationships in an immigration society in order to be able to address experiences of belonging and not belonging. Only then can it be conveyed that the crimes of National Socialism concern everyone in society.

2 Images of the perpetrator - from distancing oneself to fascination

Until now, education about National Socialism has concentrated strongly on relationships towards the victims. There is a pedagogical desire for the development of empathy with the persecuted groups and consequently, a clear distancing from the perpetrators. Yet more and more educators are reporting that young males in particular are fascinated by National Socialist perpetrators. They resist identifying with the victims, because this appears less attractive. Representations of maleness are increasingly playing a more important role in this process than differences linked to migration and ethnicity. The fixation on ethnic differences distracts attention from a view of history shaped by sexual stereotypes. What is needed is both a more precise analysis of perpetration and a more gender-sensitive approach to contemporary perceptions of perpetrators.

It is necessary to develop a pedagogical approach to perpetrator guilt that will involve reflection on the media-propagated clichés of perpetrators who appear strange and monstrous. Education work cannot ensure a morally unambiguous distancing from the perpetrators, but it can convey differentiated information and promote reflection on the social, cultural and political / ideological starting conditions for crimes.

3 Perpetrator guilt in historical relations

More recent approaches to history education and political education work address the heterogeneity of access to history and allow the history of National Socialism to be represented as a European and global "history of relations" (Ulla Kux). They work against the tendency to convey remembrance work as an exclusively German issue. Efforts to foster multiple perspectives and controversy (Heidi Behrens) pose a dual challenge to education work. On the one hand, it is important not to relativise German perpetrator guilt, but on the other hand, the European complexity (surely the author means complicity, transcription error?) in the extent and implementation of the Holocaust must also be imparted. One sociological starting point lies in the reconstruction of the diverse positions in which people found themselves and the ambiguous identities within a 'Holocaust Society' (Matthias Heyl). The task is to provide space for heterogeneity in education work without identifying diversity along the lines of certain distinguishing features. The aforementioned approaches allow diverse views of the historical subject matter, instead of a fixation on suspected cultural or national identities of the participants in educational processes.