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Collective Memory of the Nazi Past and Transnational Academic Mobility
A First Approach to the Topic through the ERASMUS Experiences of German Students abroad

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Declaration

I, Debora Guanella hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Collective Memory of the Nazi Past and Transnational Academic Mobility. A First Approach to the Topic through the ERASMUS Experiences of German Students abroad”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

I hereby declare that the written (printed and bound) and the electronic copy of the submitted MA thesis are identical.

Signed

Date 01.08.2016
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Preface

This thesis is the final requirement to graduate with an MA degree in Euroculture. It reports research done between February and August 2016 at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. The thesis also represents the last important step of two intense years spent living, studying and working between Germany, the Netherlands, Poland and Italy. As a transnational student myself, I wrote this thesis also as a means of giving voice to the students’ experiences abroad.

The thesis has been supervised by Prof. Dr. Dirk Schumann (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen) and by Prof. Dr. Hubertus Büschel (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen). I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to both my supervisors for their useful guidance and insightful comments on this work.

My warmest thanks also go to Prof. Dr. Elizabeth Goering and to Dr. Lars Klein for their methodological consultation.

_Herzlichen Dank_ to my guinea pigs Eva, Galina and Mia, who kindly agreed to test my survey questionnaire. _Ein großer Dank_ also to Axel and Samuel for their incredible patience and useful feedback.

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Debora Guanella
Introduction

From the decades immediately after the Second World War up to the present day, the topic of German collective memory with specific regard to the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes has been the focus of a plethora of debates and academic research.

During the second half of the Fifties, the idea of Vergangenheitsbewältigung (literally, “mastering the past”, but it has been most often translated with the English expression “coming to terms with the past”) emerged in West German public sphere and the expression initially carried an ironic connotation, as trying to “master the past” was perceived as noble as it was delusive. Little by little the term lost its mocking character and “came to denote all the discussions about the appropriate political, social, and moral agendas for the post-fascist age and all initiatives designed to implement these alleged historical lessons”.

Scholars often disagree on the nature of the Vergangenheitsbewältigung process, whether it has to be considered as a definite process or if it is supposed to remain an open question. Some argue that the choice of the word “mastering [the past]” itself presupposes the fact that the whole process is aiming at reaching a definitive control over the past, a point at which the past can be declared finally mastered. Others stress instead the ongoing character of the process, as reconciliation with what happened during the Second World War is far from being achieved. Either way, it is undeniable that the socio-political situation in Germany has dramatically changed over the last seventy years, and that the significance of the Nazi past and of the debates around it have developed accordingly.

Current research on German collective memory of the Nazi past is particularly interested in analysing the pluralisation of German memory discourse, with specific

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1 West Germany discourse on how to deal with the Nazi past and its legacy was characterised by two different strands. On the one hand, the left-liberal model of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, according to which the Germany’s self-understanding had to be shaped around the Holocaust and its memory, and, on the other hand, conservative efforts to “normalize” German national identity by defusing the memory of the Holocaust. Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 168.
3 Ibid.
attention to family memories as alternative versions challenging the institutionalised forms of remembering. In most cases, however, the matter has been analysed primarily from a domestic point of view, concentrating mainly on those dynamics internal to German society. Nevertheless, foreign elements are proven to be able to have quite a powerful impact on public discourse, even regarding those matters – such as collective memory – which may be perceived as strictly national and private. A typical example in this sense is the broadcast of American TV series “Holocaust” on German television in 1979. It representation of the Holocaust through the eyes of a Jewish family stirred up German public opinion and it was said to have done more in addressing the lack of empathy of Germans towards the victims of the Nazi crimes than all the attempts of the Vergangenheitsbewältigung agenda.  

Today young Germans tend to spend time studying abroad increasingly often. Student mobility across Europe has been made possible by the ERASMUS Programme, which was started in 1987 by the European Commission. Every year, more than 30,000 German students leave home to go and spend up to one year studying at a partner university. An ERASMUS stay goes far beyond the mere academic exchange. For many young participants, it also represents the first time living away from home, the first immersion in a foreign environment, the first opportunity to make friends in an intercultural context. Short-term transnational study experiences such as ERASMUS stays provide the students with “not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself – particularly one’s national identity – in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self”.

At this point, one might question why Germans should expect to be confronted with the legacy of the Nazi at some point while being abroad. Although at first sight it may be seen primarily as a national matter, the meaning of the experience of the National Socialism and of the Holocaust transcends German borders. Gerald Delanty argues that, the trauma of the Holocaust constituted a suitable starting point around which Europe can articulate its historical self-understanding and address its lack of a

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common historical experience. The Third Reich and the Holocaust are thus not an exclusively German experience, and in the context of transnational academic mobility, several instances typical of ERASMUS sojourns (for example academic work, casual conversations with peers/locals, museum visits and other cultural activities) might introduce German students to alternative interpretations of the Nazi past and serve as instruments of critical reflection.

Given these premises, the thesis analyses from a transdisciplinary point of view how young Germans make sense of the Nazi past by seeking to answer the following research question: how do German students adapt, negotiate and re-interpret German collective memory of the Nazi past in the light of their ERASMUS experience? The issue was approached through a qualitative research, as it is the most suitable research design to explore phenomena related to behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. The empirical part is based on the data collect through seven qualitative surveys compiled by German former ERASMUS students of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. The thesis is not intended to be exhaustive or indicative of any specific character that can be generalized to the entire German student population. It is rather to be regarded as a first approach to the topic, which aims to shed some light on the possible implications of negotiation of German collective memory of the Nazi past in transnational contexts through the experiences of the seven participants. The themes emerged from the analysis of the data set have highlight the presence of some interesting common points in the students’ experiences and they can thus constitute a good starting point for further more targeted explorative researches.

The first two chapters combine the presentation of the thesis theoretical foundations with the review of some relevant literature on the two core topics of this thesis, namely collective memory of the Nazi past and transnational study experiences.

Chapter 1 will present a comprehensive overview of the current discourse on collective memory of the Nazi past in Germany. It will provide the theoretical foundations to discuss the concept of collective memory in its most typical articulations (individual and collective, cultural and communicative). Particular attention will be

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given to the construction of collective memory in the social contexts of family and school and to the idea of memory contests as a dialogic and dynamic process capturing the essence of the post-reunification pluralisation of German memory culture.

Chapter 2 will examine the role of the ERASMUS Programme as a framework for transnational study mobility in Europe. It will present the position of transnational students as social actors mediating between the home and the host environment and how their experiences have been approached in some selected recent studies. It will be argued that the culture shock theory by Kalervo Oberg and social identity theory by Henri Tajfel can be regarded as important instruments to analyse the impact of transnational mobility on the students’ understanding of the self.

Chapter 3 will start by framing the research questions and then it will continue presenting the methodological approach and a detailed account of all the methodological choices.

The main findings of the analysis of the data set will be presented in Chapter 4. First, the themes emerging from the surveys will be described in a detailed way and later they will be discussed and anchored to the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2. In the light of the analysis’s results, a further reflection on the generation to which the research’s participants belong will be elaborated through the analysis of three online magazine articles and one movie.

Finally, the Conclusion will summarise the main findings in order answer the research question and it will provide some recommendations for future research in this field.
CHAPTER 1 - The idea of memory contests and the dichotomy of communicative and cultural collective memory

This first chapter focuses on the different forms and articulations of collective memory of the Nazi past in contemporary Germany. It starts by introducing the idea of memory contests as an alternative to the paradigm of Vergangenheitsbewältigung able to take into account the pluralisation of German memory culture. The focus then shifts to the definition of collective memory, with particular attention to its social dimension. Finally, the chapter examines the analytical distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory and its concretization in the context of German society.

1.1 From the Vergangenheitsbewältigung paradigm to the idea of “memory contests”

The German expression “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” started being used in post-war West Germany to indicate the socio-political discussions on the aftermath of Nazi rule and crimes.¹ The main idea behind the Vergangenheitsbewältigung process² is that there is a link between the past and the present that cannot be denied and that a careful

² Vergangenheitsbewältigung is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. For the sake of this thesis, it will not be analysed in depth, as the idea of Vergangenheitsbewältigung is used here to provide the social and historical background necessary to understand the concept of “memory contests”. For a more detailed analysis of the philosophical and sociological debates around the German process of coming to terms with the past, please refer to the “Holy trinity” (as defined in Gavriel, D. Rosenfeld, Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich (Berkley: University of California Press, 2000), 2-3) of the German Vergangenheitsbewältigung tradition:

reflection on the Nazi regime’s atrocities and their legacy can have a positive effect on both the socio-political and economic conditions of Germany (understood as West Germany first, and unified Germany later).³

The phenomenon of Vergangenheitsbewältigung is characterised by a strong normative nature.⁴ The Nazi past and its legacy should not simply be acknowledged and faced by German society, but they rather need to be examined and approached according to an “official programme of commemoration and education”.⁵ All the initiatives undertaken in the name of the Vergangenheitsbewältigung’s ideals aim at guiding Germany through the process of coming to terms with the crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime, in order to prevent that dark chapter of history from ever repeating itself.⁶ Terms such as “agendas”⁷ and “lessons”⁸ are often used in relation to Vergangenheitsbewältigung initiatives and this lexical choice further highlights the strong regulative character of the Vergangenheitsbewältigung process. The idea of Vergangenheitsbewältigung is thus an attempt to “enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past”,⁹ which does not leave much room for negotiation of the past itself or different interpretations of the link between past and present.

Over the last seventy years German socio-political situation has dramatically changed and, accordingly, the relationship of German society with the Nazi past and its legacy has also evolved. With the ever-increasing historical distance to National Socialism one might question both whether German younger generations still perceive the legacy of Nazi crimes as “their own” past and still feel the need to come to terms with it and whether the normative paradigm of Vergangenheitsbewältigung still applies to the current socio-political conditions.

Starting in the early Nineties, the German reunification process upset the socio-political balance that had been struck after the Second World War. New economic, social, and political conditions had to be established and German society had to face

⁴ Anne Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.
⁷ Lebow, Kansteiner, Fogu, The Politics of Memory in Post War Europe, 102.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse, 3.
some important challenges. According to Bill Niven, the re-unification influenced also the national discourse about the examination of the Nazi past in the sense that it led to a more open approach towards it.\(^\text{10}\)

Some scholars argue that East Germany\(^\text{11}\) was impacted the most in this sense, as upon reunification it needed to find a way to incorporate the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* values and lessons into their social and moral system.\(^\text{12}\) Nevertheless, it is undeniable that such an important and meaningful event had an impact also in West Germany and had new situations emerge in the whole nation. The Nineties saw an increasing number of debates about how Germans should manage the Nazi past, which reverberated through the national public discourse.\(^\text{13}\) In her book “Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory” Anne Fuchs mentions the Fest-Grass controversy as an emblematic example of these post-reunification public disputes.\(^\text{14}\) The triggering event was a statement by the left-wing writer and Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass, who admitted his affiliation with the Waffen-SS during the last months of the Second World War.\(^\text{15}\) Fest especially criticised Grass for having kept this fact a secret for such a long time while engaging in political criticism with others regarding the Nazi past.\(^\text{16}\)

The fact that some of these controversies generated intense reactions clearly show how some dates, such as 1945 with the end of the Second World War and now also 1989 with the start of the German reunification process, are not only turning points for the development of German socio-political conditions, but also “emotionally charged nodes”\(^\text{17}\) on the discussion of German collective memory and identity.\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{11}\) It is important to point out that, in this first phase of the post-war period, facing the Nazi past was a prerogative of the Federal Republic of Germany (FDR), as in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) “the burden of responsibility for Nazism was imputed uniquely to Hitler’s West German heirs” by the communist regime. (see Tony Judt, “From The House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory”. Accessed May 14, 2016. [http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2005/oct/06/from-the-house-of-the-dead-on-modern-european-mem/](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2005/oct/06/from-the-house-of-the-dead-on-modern-european-mem/)).


\(^{13}\) Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, Georg Grote, ed., *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (New York: Camden House, 2006), 2.

\(^{14}\) Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse*, 2.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, *German Memory Contests*, 2.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.
However, debates and controversies on the Nazi past and its legacy are not an invention of the post-reunification years. So what makes these disputes different from those discussions that characterized the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* discourse in the previous decades? As already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, German socio-political landscape has changed under the impact of the reunification. Fuchs argues therefore that a possible explanation for this new wave of vibrant debates about the Nazi crimes and their legacy is the fact that the political foundations laid during the post-war period were dismantled by the reunification process, causing social, political and economic insecurity. This situation of general uncertainty about the future thus triggered the above-mentioned discussions about Germany’s past, “as if public consensus about the Past had to be established before a joined future could be mastered”.

Always according to Fuchs, a second reason that makes these post-unification debates to a certain extent different from the previous ones is that they are characterised by a strong personal attempt to understand history. After almost half a century of West Germany pedagogy of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* pushing to establish an institutionalized understanding of the past, it finally became possible to “address the floating gap between the subjective experience of history and scholarly historical explanations”.

One last factor that certainly played an important role in characterising these post-reunification debates is the increasing distance from the period of Nazi rule, which allowed new scenarios to emerge. The 1990s saw a notable re-discovery of family memories: “once they entered the public domain, they contributed in exposing the limit of Germany’s official remembrance culture, which for decades had been pushing people’s private memories of war to the side.”

In this context, Fuchs suggested to define such debates as “memory contests”, a term that

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19 The most well-known of these intellectual and political controversies is probably the so-called *Historikerstreit* (often translated into English as “the historians’ dispute”). Tony Judt summarize the *Historikerstreit* (1986-1989) as “a much publicised argument among professional historians over the proper way to interpret and contextualise the Nazi years”. See Tony Judt, “The past is another country: myth and memory in post-war Europe”, in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 172.
20 Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, *German Memory Contests*, 2.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 6.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
(…) puts emphasis on a pluralistic memory culture which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the idea that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves that forge their sense of identity. The notion of memory contests thus gives expression to the fact that memories always offer heavily edited versions of selves, groups and of their worlds.  

Memory contests are primarily characterised by a personal attempt to understand history. Due to increasing temporal distance from the time of Nazi rule, hidden and repressed archives of private family memory have been gradually released, causing these personal stories and experiences to come up beside and even challenge the official versions. The diffusion and discussion of these private alternative versions triggered a shift away from the institutionalised forms of cultural memory anchored in historical experience, causing a pluralisation of German memory.

This attitude can also be observed in the cultural sphere, as it was inundated with autobiographies, television documentaries, films and talk shows focusing on Zeitzeugen’s personal experiences. In many cases these cultural products are biographies and fictional memories written by the children and grandchildren of Holocaust victims, survivors and perpetrators dealing with their family histories.

In this context, it appears evident that the old, strictly normative paradigm of Vergangenheitsbewältigung has become a dated notion and it cannot be applied to this new situation, as it captures neither the diversification of German memory, nor the multicultural reality of reunified German society. As Fuchs explained, the idea of memory contests does not only “expose the gap between an increasingly ossified official remembrance culture and people’s private war memories, but also advanced competing claims about vastly different historical experiences”.

Arguing for the dismissal of the paradigm of Vergangenheitsbewältigung in favour of the more pluralistic idea of memory contests does however, not mean that the Vergangenheitsbewältigung process is to considered finished and that German society has reached a point in which the Nazi past and its legacy can finally be declared as

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25 Ibid.
26 Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse, 1.
27 Ibid.
28 Caroline Schaumann, Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women’s Literature (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 149-151.
30 Fuchs, “World War II in German cultural memory”, 50.
31 Ibid., 51.
mastered. The passage from *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to the idea of memory contests rather acknowledges the fact that the German socio-political landscape underwent such meaningful changes since reunification that the public discourse on the memory of the Nazi past needs to evolve accordingly to take into account new emerging topics.³²

The idea of memory contests thus does not try to push any normative understanding of the past, but it rather accepts and takes into consideration the fact that the memories of the Nazi past can be negotiated, adapted and edited according to the private experiences of both social groups and individuals.³³ This allows for a “more differentiated approach to the past that makes room for alternative interpretations of historical experience”.³⁴

1.1.2 Memory contests at the level of the individual

In their original significance, memory contests are public disputes arising from the clash between different subjective positions towards history. In the example provided by Fuchs, the Grass/Fest controversy was indicated as the origin of a memory contest in German public sphere in the early 21st century.³⁵ Based on their personal historical experiences, the two prominent intellectuals developed contrasting positions about the Third Reich and Holocaust’s significance in the development of German identity. Despite the fact that these personal narratives could not possibly reflect the experience of the majority of the German population today, their stories were a sort of “meta-narrative” about the politics of memory of the Nazi time and their significance in the present.³⁶ The memory contest originated at a public level “in the following weeks, [when] comparisons were drawn between the two texts concerning the question of what it means to be German today”.³⁷

If it is true that intellectuals’ individual understanding of history can lead to a memory contest on a public level, it is also true that personal attempts to understand history are not exclusive to public figures such as historians and philosophers. As a matter of fact, each individual is the node where historical knowledge, personal experiences and memory (both individual and collective) intersect. When interpretations based on personal experiences emerged alongside institutionalised forms of collective

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³² Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, *German Memory Contests*, 17.
³³ Ibid., 12
³⁴ Ibid.
³⁵ Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse*, 2-3.
³⁶ Ibid.
³⁷ Ibid.
memory, individuals can edit, negotiate and adapt them constructing their own narratives. These versions can present contrasting interpretations of the past and thus challenge the traditional remembrance, the tension between the two forms of memory may lead to some sort of memory contest at individual level.

Drawing upon Maurice Halbwachs’s theories about the social construction of collective memory, the next section presents an overview of the concept of collective memory in its most typical articulations (individual and collective, communicative and cultural memory) to exemplify how the different version of the past clashing in memory contests are socially developed.

1.2 Definition of collective memory

The definition of collective memory has been considered an intricate and controversial issue since its conceptualisation by Maurice Halbwachs in 1950. “Collective memory” is a vague term and it requires some important distinctions, as different concepts and different approaches have been developed to define it from different angles.

The first crucial distinction is between individual and collective memory. Individual memory refers to biological memory, to the ability of one’s mind to store and remember information and past experiences. Individual memory has been extensively studied from a psychological point of view. Three different systems of memory have been individuated in this context: procedural memory, which stores those actions that have become habitual for the individual, semantic memory, which process the knowledge acquired through active learning, and finally episodic memory, which concerns an individual’s lived experience. Episodic memory is considered highly fragmentary and arbitrary, as single episodes are usually remembered as isolated scenes with no apparent order and/or cohesion. Despite their seeming randomness, episodic memories are actually always connected to a wider network of individual memories and others’ memories as well. Episodic memories are “transient, changing, and volatile”.

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39 Ibid., 2.
40 Ibid., 5.
42 Ibid., 212-213.
43 Ibid., 213.
and, what is even more important, all individual memories are limited in time and will eventually dissolve with the death of the individual who carried them. In the expression “collective memory”, the word “memory” is not used in a literal sense, but rather as a metaphor. Social groups cannot remember literally, but their process of selection and creation of a shared past resembles the dynamics of individual memory.

In its broader sense, collective memory refers to “the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past”. Collective memory is shared, passed on, and constructed by groups. A clear distinction between individual and collective memory is only possible on an analytical level, because in reality there is a constant interaction between all the different kinds of memory (individual and collective, cultural and communicative).

On the individual level, memory and identity are closely linked to one another. As a matter of fact one’s memories are nothing other than “the stuff out of which individual experiences, interpersonal relations, the sense of responsibility, and the image of our own identity are made.” In a similar same way, collective memory constitutes the backbone of a social group’s identity, that is, one’s self-awareness, be it as individual or as member of a specific social group (e.g. family, community, nation, religious group etc.).

If on the one hand individuals’ existence is deeply connected with the social environment they lived in, then on the other they are also the central actors of collective memory. Even though they may have not experienced themselves a certain event, they have the power to construct, interpret, negotiate and adapt those shared interpretations of the past they encounter through socialisation with other individuals in different social contexts.

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 A. Assmann, “Memory Individual and Collective”, 211.
50 Ibid., 212.
The French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is considered the father of collective memory theory. Questions of memory and identity had long been studied in different disciplines (from philosophy to history to psychology), but Halbwachs had the merit to take a new approach shifting “the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework in a cultural one”.52

In his book “Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire” (translated into English as “On Collective Memory”) Halbwachs focused on memory as a social mediation and frame of individual experience.53 His work also provided the framework for following studies on collective memory54 and, in the context of German collective memory of the Nazi crimes, most studies on grandchildren are framed in his social theories of memory.55

Halbwachs did not invent the term “collective memory”, which was circulating among scholars already in the second half of the nineteenth century, but he rather popularized it.56 According to his theory, collective memory needs to be understood as both a “projection of individual memory onto a group”, and as the “ways in which a group frames and represents its past”.57 This definition excludes thus the existence of a single, homogenous memory, and it suggests that there are as many collective memories as groups.58 In this sense, Halbwachs opposed the pluralistic idea of collective memories to the monolithic nature of history.59

Collective memory is a powerful social binding agent, as it plays a fundamental role in reinforcing the social bond among a group of people who share the same experiences and contemporary interpretations of the past.60 Halbwachs also stressed the societal aspect of collective memory, which is to be treated not as a given, but rather as a socially constructed notion.61 Memory cannot be detached from the social contexts in which it was developed and this makes it neither neutral nor individual, but always

54 In German context, this applies to the works of Jan und Aleida Assmann.
56 Siobhan Kattago, Ambiguous Memory the Nazi Past and German National Identity (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 13
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 14.
59 Ibid., 15.
60 Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 51.
61 Ibid., 72.
mediated and transmitted through social institutions such as schools, museums, official national holidays etc.\textsuperscript{62}

In the Nineties, the German scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann developed further Halbwachs’s theory on collective memory and added another dimension to it, namely that of communicative and cultural memory.

1.2.1 Communicative and cultural memory

In his article “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, Jan Assmann breaks up the notion of collective memory into communicative and cultural memory.\textsuperscript{63} The concept of “communicative memory” was introduced in order to explain the difference between Halbwachs’s understanding of “collective memory” and Assmann’s idea of “cultural memory”.\textsuperscript{64} One of the most important features of Assmann’s idea of cultural memory is its exteriorized and objectified nature.\textsuperscript{65} Since this institutionalized character does not apply to Halbwachs’s understanding of collective memory, he proposed to rename it “communicative memory”, which is fundamentally non-institutional.\textsuperscript{66}

Communicative memory consists of all those kinds of collective memory dependent on every-day communication.\textsuperscript{67} It usually involves two or more partners who alternatively lead the conversation and it takes place in a clearly defined social context.\textsuperscript{68} In the article, Assmann clearly explains that collective memory is constructed by individuals and the impact these situations have on them:

through this manner of communication, each individual composes a memory which, as Halbwachs has shown, is (a) socially mediated and (b) relates to a group. Every individual memory constitutes itself in communication with others. These “others”, however, are not just any set of people, rather they are groups who conceive their unity and peculiarity through a common image of their past. Halbwachs thinks of families, neighborhood and professional groups, political parties, associations, etc., up to and including nations.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{63} J. Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, 110.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{67} J. Assmann, “Communicative Memory and Cultural Identity”, 126.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 126-127.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 127.
Communicative memory is neither formalised nor institutionalised and has a limited time depth, which normally reaches back no further than 80 years (ideal time span of three interacting biological generations).\(^{70}\)

In contrast, cultural memory is characterised by its distance from the everyday and “it is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sound of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent”.\(^{71}\) Cultural memory plays an important role in cementing the identity of a specific social group, as it “preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity”.\(^{72}\) Cultural memory is organised around meaningful events of the past, which are remembered and transmitted through both cultural and institutional practices.\(^{73}\)

If every type of memory is characterised by an intrinsic relation between remembering and forgetting, cultural memory also shows a third aspect, which is a “combination of remembering and forgetting.”\(^{74}\) This feature refers to the cultural practice of storing extensive information that exceeds the capacity of human memory in archives, libraries and museums. This information is not actively remembered, neither completely forgotten, as it can be accessed anytime.\(^{75}\)

To this distinction between communicative and cultural memory, Aleida Assmann added another type of mediated memory, which she defines as “political memory”.\(^{76}\) Cultural memory turns into political memory the moment when history is used for the purpose of identity formation.\(^{77}\) Political memory is an “explicit, homogenous, and institutionalized top-down memory”,\(^{78}\) which is stabilized in visual and verbal signs, in selected historical events and in physical sites/monuments in order to be transmitted through the generations.\(^{79}\) Aleida Assmann cites national memory as the most suitable example of political memory, as it clearly shows that some elements of the past have

\(^{70}\) J. Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”, 111.
\(^{71}\) Ibid., 110.
\(^{72}\) J. Assmann, “Communicative Memory and Cultural Identity”, 130
\(^{73}\) Ibid.
\(^{74}\) A. Assmann, “Memory Individual and Collective”, 220.
\(^{75}\) Ibid.
\(^{76}\) Ibid., 215.
\(^{79}\) Ibid., 217.
been selected and institutionalized to support the construction of collective memory and national identity.80

In the actual memory practice of both individuals and social groups, the borders between communicative memory and cultural memory are blurred and the two levels are constantly overlapping.81 Both forms of collective memory can change and be reshaped over time. Due to its highly institutionalised nature, it may take a long period of time to re-configure the structures of cultural memory, while communicative memory is evolving much faster by adding new elements, forgetting some and adding more value to others.82

1.3 Social dimension of collective memory

This continuous evolution and negotiation of collective memory always takes place in social contexts. Halbwachs stressed the social dimension of collective memory, concentrating on the social construction of both individual and collective memories in discourse and in practice. The individual is always the subject in both collective and individual memory: in the end, individuals are the only carriers of memories, even though the formulation, structuring and process of remembering occurs in interactions with others.83 Personal memories can only survive if they are articulated within socially recognisable terms and conventions of the group(s) the individual belongs to, otherwise they are lost. To explain this fundamental point with Halbwachs’s words, “the individual calls recollections to mind by relying on the frameworks of social memory.”84

The individual is thus essential to the formation and perpetration process of collective memory, and he has the power to adapt and negotiate collective memory to create his own narratives. Too often, however, individuals are portrayed as relatively powerless in the process of collective memory construction.85 Moreover, scholars in the multidisciplinary field of collective memory studies often fail to address the relationship

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80 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
84 Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 182.
between macro-level representations and micro-level perceptions of the past, focusing too often exclusively on the societal representations or elite discourse.\textsuperscript{86}

Social context thus influences and shape every memory of the individual. Several scholars\textsuperscript{87} drew attention to family as a \textit{Teilbereich} (subdomain) of collective memory.\textsuperscript{88} The family is the site of communicative memory par excellence. Already Halbwachs had included the family in the social contexts where collective memory is constructed and negotiated through interaction with other individuals.\textsuperscript{89} Family has also been described as “intersection of the private and the public”, a context where the official representations of the past are contested by alternative memories from below.\textsuperscript{90}

School, on the other hand, can be considered as the first site where young generations are exposed to historical knowledge and cultural memory in a systematic way. Several didactic tools, from history books to museum visits, from documentary movies to national school holidays, can in fact be regarded as objectified expressions of collective historical experience.

As already explained before, while using this classification of collective memory in communicative and cultural memory it is important to keep in mind that such categorisation makes sense only on an analytical level, while in the actual memory practice the two sphere constantly interact with one another.\textsuperscript{91} This means that it is possible to find some elements of cultural memory in family dialogue, and, vice versa, some images of communicative memory in school context.

Anne Fuchs renamed communicative and cultural memory as “vernacular” and “official” memory while arguing for an “intrinsic tension between the emotional need for some kind of positive family and cultural heritage and the cognitive engagement with the history of the Third Reich”.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{86} Wolfgram, “The Legacies of Memory”, 89-90.
\textsuperscript{88} Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, Karoline Tschuggnall, \textit{“Opa war kein Nazi”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis} (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2002), 13.
\textsuperscript{89} Jan Assmann, “Communicative Memory and Cultural Identity, 127.
\textsuperscript{90} Fuchs, \textit{Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse}, 4.
\textsuperscript{91} Welzer, “Communicative Memory”, 285.
\textsuperscript{92} Fuchs, \textit{Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse}, 7.
1.3.1 Communicative memory in German context – the Nazi past in family dialogue

Family is an important lieu de souvenir⁹³, a social context where (living) memory is discussed in a private and subjective way.⁹⁴ With regard to Germany’s management of the Nazi past, families are usually the first place where German children start to hear about life and death during the Third Reich. Later on, family dialogue also becomes the source of alternative representations of the past, which at times challenge the official remembering.

Even before approaching the Third Reich in history classes, German children have in most cases already been exposed to the topic to the extent that they often have a well-shaped images of it.⁹⁵ Family dialogue has been studied to observe how historical consciousness is discussed and evolves through intergenerational communication. What scientific literature has often failed to address, however, is “(…) the gap between historical knowledge on the one hand and the production of social memory on the other (…)”.⁹⁶

In order to address this gap, at the beginning of the 2000s the German sociologist Harald Welzer coordinated a research project focusing on how history is kept alive in intergenerational dialogue and how younger generations mediate between information from school and from home.⁹⁷ Welzer and his team conducted 142 interviews with individuals from both West and East Germany families. Moreover, they observed 40 family dialogues in which members from three different generations interacted with each other.⁹⁸

Drawing upon Halbwachs’s theory on collective memory and Jan Assmann’s categorisation of communicative and cultural memory, Welzer expected some kollektive Bezugsrahmen (collective frames of reference) to be developed within each family as a way of defining both the issues at stake and the group itself.⁹⁹ According to Halbwachs, the members of every social group share some specific and defined attitudes and ideas that help define the social group itself.¹⁰⁰

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⁹³ Aleida Assmann, Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik, 121
⁹⁴ Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse, 4.
⁹⁶ Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, German Memory Contests, 6-7.
⁹⁸ Ibid.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 134-136.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 134.
The study showed that family memories influence the way young Germans approach history as encountered at school. Children and grandchildren of Zeitzeugen tend to present their family members in a positive way, either as victims of the Nazi regime or as heroes of everyday resistance. Welzer calls this process “kumulative Heroisierung” (“cumulative heroization”). This more or less conscious practice also contributes to reinforcing the idea that during the Third Reich “the Germans” and “the Nazis” were two separate groups. The phenomenon of kumulative Heroisierung also shows how strongly emotional views of individual roles influence the individual perception of history.

The data collected through a precedent pilot study allowed Welzer to identify the following five Tradierungstypen (models of transmission), that is theme-specific and re-occurring prototypes in transgenerational family dialogues:

- **Opferschaft** (victimism) – The German population is often portrayed as the first victim of the Nazi regime. This model is based on a Wechselrahmung (change of frame), which consists in transferring some characteristics usually referred to the massacres of Jews to the situation of the Germans.

- **Rechtfertigung** (justification) – The idea that Germans did not know anything about concentration camps and the massacres perpetrated there was developed only after the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, this justification is applied to the war period through a process of retroactive transmission.

- **Distanzierung** (alienation) – Many Zeitzeugen represent their position towards the Nazi regime as already critical at that time in order to mark the distance between themselves and the Nazi crimes.

- **Faszination** (fascination) – This model highlight the effect of Nazi propaganda on German population. Zeitzeugen sometimes talk about wartime episodes with
a nostalgic tone, as if they were remembering stories from the good old times.\textsuperscript{110}

- \textit{Überwältigung} (overpowering) – Some situations and experiences hit the \textit{Zeitzeugen} so hard, that they feel like the time did not pass and talk about them as if they were a present event.\textsuperscript{111}

These initial leitmotifs were then confronted and adjusted with the data gathered through the interviews. Since the model of overpowering was not brought up often, it was replaced by the model of \textit{Heldentum} (heroism), a theme that was omnipresent in the interviews and dialogues.\textsuperscript{112} The theme that was mentioned more often by the interviewees was the one of victimism.\textsuperscript{113}

Welzer’s study surely had the merit to shed light on the complex dynamics of intergenerational family dialogue and on how the younger Generations mediate all the images of the Nazi past provided by different sources. Commenting on this research project, Fuchs summarizes its findings stating that “the study does not prove that the third post-war generation is characterised by an erosion of historical consciousness, but it rather underlines that in family memories are not normally instruments of critical reflection”.\textsuperscript{114}

Nevertheless, the work done by Welzer and his team also shows some methodological limitations.\textsuperscript{115} By selecting only families in which three generations shared stories about the Nazi past, all those significant cases when such confrontation did not happen (either by the will of one or more family members or due to force majeure) are inevitably left out.\textsuperscript{116} Welzer himself has however stated in the introduction to “Opa war kein Nazi” that he was more interested in the impact of what is said in family dialogues rather than in what is not said.\textsuperscript{117} The silence on the Nazi past and its implications in family contexts is instead one of the focuses of Gabriele Rosenthal’s book “Der Holocaust im Leben von drei Generationen Familien von Überlebenden der Shoah und von Nazi Tätern.”

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{114} Fuchs, \textit{Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse}, 7.
\textsuperscript{115} Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, \textit{German Memory Contests}, 7.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Welzer, Moller, Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”, 15.
Rosenthal’s research project also aimed at investigating the change of attitudes towards the Holocaust through the different generations and the dynamics of family dialogue, but with a specific focus on families of victims and of perpetrators. Through a qualitative case-study approach, she interviewed 38 selected families of Holocaust victims from Israel and of Nazi perpetrators from both West and East Germany. Although the interviews were intended to explore the psychological perspective on the Holocaust of younger generations, they were conducted in a scientific context and not a therapeutic setting.

The analysis of the data revealed that family dialogue had quite similar dynamics in both the victims’ and perpetrators’ families. The fear of death emerged as a constant theme for younger generations, but in different articulations: while the victims’ descendants showed the anxiety of being separated from their relatives, the perpetrators’ children and grandchildren manifested a more or less conscious fear of being killed by them.

Rosenthal also attributes great importance also to what was not being said in the family dialogues and stresses the “significance of communicative silence” in intergenerational dynamics. Silence itself had often become a sort of institutionalised practice in both the perpetrators’ and the victims’ families. Family secrets and obstructing techniques can make communication very difficult, and they are used as responses to different problems and with different motives. Victims of the Holocaust decide not to talk about their experiences during the Third Reich in order to prevent the same nightmares and pain they have been suffering from since then to haunt their descendants. Perpetrators instead prefer to remain silent about the Nazi crimes to protect themselves from accusation and loss of affection from the other family members.

Also in this case, the deliberate selection of families with determined characteristics (namely the presence of either Holocaust victims or perpetrators) leaves

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119 Ibid., 12.
120 Ibid., 13.
121 Ibid., 18.
122 Ibid., 20-22.
123 Fuchs, Cosgrove, Grote, *German Memory Contests*, 7.
125 Ibid., 20.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
out all those situations in which no family ancestors came into direct contact with the Nazi crimes.

The two research projects reviewed in this section are only two examples of studies on German families as sites of communicative memory of the Nazi past. However, if read in combination they can already provide interesting insights into both dialogues and silence about the Nazi past in contexts of intergenerational communication.

1.3.2 Cultural memory in German context – education about the National Socialism and the Holocaust

History classes are more than a plain process of historical knowledge transfer from the teacher to the students. In the classrooms, history and cultural memory are inextricably intertwined, starting with the school history curricula shaped following the guidelines provided by the education ministry (of the Länder in the case of Germany). The decision about what to include in the curricula, the selection of photographs in history books, the visits to museums and memorials can be considered an expression of cultural memory in the educational context.

When talking about education about and after the Holocaust, Theodor Adorno is certainly the first name that comes to mind. In 1966 he gave the radio speech “Erziehung nach Auschwitz” (“Education after Auschwitz”) arguing that the first and foremost goal of education should be to prevent another Auschwitz. He also expressed concern over the indifference shown by the German population towards the victims of the Nazi crimes. The promotion of a post-Holocaust education agenda should have been a necessity to educate the post-war generation “to civil, humane and tolerant behaviour and to immunize them against racist and nationalist ideas”. Adorno did thus promote not only empathy, but also autonomy and critical thinking, so that individuals could learn to make their own decision and do not blindly follow the

129 To be understood as after primary school, at high school level.
crowd. With this speech, Adorno showed his faith in the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* process as the path German society should follow to come to terms with the Nazi past.

The role of education seems thus to oscillate between historical knowledge and moral consciousness. Nevertheless, despite Adorno’s plea, educators “followed the outlines of an anti-fascist education about the National Socialism and the Holocaust, which strongly focused on cognitive (historical) learning and emphasized the structural aspects of the rise of fascism, and was furthermore strongly influenced by critical theory and theories of fascism.”

Things started to change in the Eighties and some scholars argue that the broadcasting of the miniseries “Holocaust” in Germany in 1979 had an influence on the evolution of how the Third Reich and the Holocaust were approached at school. “Holocaust” is an American television miniseries directed by Marvin J. Chomsky, where the story of a fictional German Jewish family intersects with the one of a rising member of the SS. This series is said to have had the great merit to have made the Germans finally feel empathy for the victims of the Holocaust, as the viewer could not help but re-experience and identify themselves with the suffering of the Weiss family.

In this context, the German Professor Andreas Huyssen noted that fiction (rather than documentary) movies about the Holocaust have actually had done more in addressing the lack of empathy of Germans towards the victims of the Nazi crimes than all the attempts of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* agenda.

In the wake of the “Holocaust” series, new didactic tools, which could allow the students to get a more emotional approach to the subject, were integrated in the field of education. From this moment on, German students have increasingly often been confronted with black and white photos of the concentration camps, movies, meetings,

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133 Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, “In the Presence of the Past”, 190.
134 Ibid., 191.
137 Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, “In the Presence of the Past”, 197.
with Zeitzeugen and Holocaust survivors, visits to the concentrations camps and to museums.\textsuperscript{139} All these activities were also supported by rigid instruction strategies used by the teachers and educators, in order to prevent any possibility of moral ambiguity.\textsuperscript{140}

Museums, memorials and the textbooks themselves can be considered as objectifications of cultural memory. As a matter of fact, they show some of the characteristics listed by Jan Assmann as typical of cultural memory: they are organised around some fixed points (in this case historical events), whose memory is maintained through institutional practices, they reconstruct the past in order to make it accessible in the present, and preserve that shared knowledge which contributes to strengthening a group’s identity.\textsuperscript{141}

During the Eighties, education about the Third Reich and about the Holocaust focused on some specific issues apart from historical events, such as the everyday life both during and after the war.\textsuperscript{142} In the same decade, five anniversaries of key moments of the history of the Nazi regime took place. These important dates were: 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship in 1983, 40th anniversary of Hitler’s assassination attempt in 1984, 40th anniversary of German capitulation in 1985, 50th anniversary of the Reichskristallnacht (from this time on renamed as Reichspogromnacht) in 1988, and the 50th anniversary of the invasion of Poland in 1989.\textsuperscript{143} Besides being institutionalised meaningful fixed points of German cultural memory, these dates also received big attention from the media and started discussions about the past.\textsuperscript{144} A similar effect was also achieved by the Historikerstreit in 1986-89.\textsuperscript{145}

As in all the other spheres of German society, the re-unification and its consequences also dominated the field of education throughout the 1990s. The new themes introduced in those years were mainly linked to the inauguration of many memorials and museums all over the country, to the reception of the movie “Schindler’s List” by Steven Spielberg (1993), and to the proclamation of January 27 as the remembrance day of the Holocaust victims in 1996.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{139} Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, “In the Presence of the Past”, 192.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} J. Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity”, 129-130.
\textsuperscript{142} Rathenow and Weber, “Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust in Gesellschaft, Staat und Erziehung: ein kritischer Rückblick”, 24-25.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 28.
Due to the increasing temporal distance from the Nazi time and the steady decrease in the number of Zeitzeugen still alive, in the 2000s students at schools started being asked to reflect upon the function of memorials and on the necessity to remember the past.\textsuperscript{147} At the same time, a growing trend against the normative tradition of officially and culturally remembering the Holocaust can also be observed among younger generations of German students.\textsuperscript{148}

It is important to point out that the history of the Holocaust and of the Third Reich together with their implication for German society are not exclusively a topic of history classes, but students are also confronted with the topic also in other instances (e.g. German classes and religion classes).\textsuperscript{149}

This chapter presented the idea of memory contests as a dialogic and dynamic process capturing the essence of the post-reunification pluralisation of German memory culture. It was also argued that, despite being coined to describe public debates about the past, the concept of memory contest can also be applied at an individual level to highlight the constant mediation between communicative and cultural memory. Particular attention was then given to the social contexts of family and school as sites of respectively communicative and cultural memory of the Nazi past. Such dynamics were approached from a mainly domestic point of view. Nowadays, however, it is very rare that individuals spend their whole life in their country of origin. Younger people tend in fact to spend some time travelling, studying and living abroad increasingly often. During their sojourn abroad, they come into contact with new value system and articulations of meanings (in this case, different interpretations and representations of the Nazi past) that may differ from what they are used to at home and thus stimulate new questions and new formulations of the self. The next chapter will analyse transnational study experiences as a source of reflection and negotiation of the self.

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 33.  
\textsuperscript{148} Hohenlohe-Bartenstein, “In the Presence of the Past”, 189.  
\textsuperscript{149} Welzer, Moller, Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”, 7.
CHAPTER 2 - ERASMUS experience and impact on the self

Individuals nowadays rarely spend their entire life in the same place. Younger generations in particular tend to spend at least some time living, studying and working abroad. During their stays in another country, they come into contact with new realities, new people, and new multicultural environments. Even though in most cases they still maintain links with family and friends at home, their lives and social practices adapt to the host country.

A particular sub-group of these modern transnational migrants consists of those students who move abroad to study for a limited period at a partner university. Since the late Eighties, academic mobility in Europe has been developing within the framework provided by the ERASMUS Programme. Supported and developed by the European Commission, the ERASMUS Programme offers the possibility to spend up to two semesters studying in another Member country to thousands of European university students every year.

This chapter accordingly begins by outlining the history and development of the ERASMUS Programme. It explains how it has become the most important academic mobility framework in Europe (to justify the choice of focusing the research done in the context of this thesis on German former ERASMUS students), and why an ERASMUS stay can be regarded as a transnational study experience despite its limited duration. Accordingly, this allows for an analysis of the ERASMUS students’ position as social actors in transnational social fields.

The chapter continues then with an overview of the most recent scientific literature dealing with the ERASMUS experience (and occasionally with transnational study experiences in general) from the students’ self-understanding’s point of view. While in Europe the attention is drawn to the role played by the ERASMUS Programme on the creation of a common European identity, overseas scholars also focus on the impact of such study sojourns on the students’ self-understanding.

Chapter 2 ends by presenting some theories (namely the culture shock theory and the development of stereotypes in contexts of intercultural communication) concerning the students’ adaption process to the environment of the host country and the socialisation in intercultural contexts. As will be presented in this last section, both these instances can in fact become important sources of reflection on the self.
2.1 ERASMUS Programme and transnational study mobility

Over the last three decades, the European Union has spent a considerable amount of time, effort and resources fostering academic mobility and harmonizing the single member states’ higher education systems. For this purpose, the ERASMUS Programme was established in 1987 by the European Union (EU) and it is nowadays considered as “the European Union’s flagship ‘mobility’ programme in education and training and one of the best-known EU-level actions”.  

2.1.1 The establishment of the ERASMUS Programme and its objectives

The ERASMUS Programme was developed to establish a general framework to support the mobility of European university students across Europe. Its core objectives are to foster a closer cooperation among European universities as well as to bring considerable benefits to both the EU itself and to the students who take part in the Programme. The possibility of spending a period of study at a foreign university is perceived as an important step in the personal and educational growth of European students. Improving the knowledge of foreign languages, encountering different cultures and training intercultural competences are certainly among the skills students can develop by taking part in the ERASMUS exchange. In the long run, the implementation of the ERASMUS Programme was intended to improve both the socio-cultural and the economic situation of the EU by “strengthen[ing] the interaction between citizens in different member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe” and by “ensur[ing] the development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level”.

1 The Programme was named after the Dutch philosopher, humanist and theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam (1465-1536). Erasmus personally experienced the benefits of contacts with other countries living and working in several different places all over Europe and, by leaving his fortune to the University of Basel, he also became a precursor of mobility grants. At the same time, ERASMUS may also be read as an acronym (or better, a “backronym” as it was deliberately created to suit a particular word) meaning EUropean community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. (“History of the ERASMUS Programme”, European Commission, accessed May 3, 2016, http://web.archive.org/web/20130404063516/http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/history_en.htm.) Being an acronym, the name of the Programme is always spelled in capital letter in the EU official documents (and the same style will also be adopted in this thesis).
2“History of the ERASMUS Programme”.
4 Ibid., 166/222.
During its first year of existence the ERASMUS Programme involved 11 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom), and gave 3,244 students the possibility to travel abroad for study stays. Over the last twenty years, the ERASMUS Programme has constantly evolved and has also considerably grown in popularity. In 2002 the Programme celebrated the important achievement of 1 million ERASMUS students. Seven years later, in 2009, this number had already duplicated, and it took only four more years to reach the milestone of 3 million ERASMUS students in 2013.

Not only has the number of actors involved grown, but the offer of the ERASMUS Programme itself has considerably developed over the years. Besides mobility programmes for students and staff, some other forms of cooperation targeting a specific sub-group or tackling specific aspects of the learning process at academic level were developed.

With more specific regard to the German context, a similar trend in the growing of the ERASMUS Programme can be observed. During the academic year 2013-14 Germany sent 36,257 students abroad and welcomed 30,964 students to its universities, registering a growth of around 10,000 units in each category compared to the 2007-08 data. These numbers brought Germany two second places in the top 5 sending and receiving countries (both times behind Spain). In the same academic years, the

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5 Since these early beginnings the ERASMUS Programme has undergone a series of major changes. In 1995 it was incorporated into the Socrates Programme together with a number of other education and exchange programmes. Five years later, the Socrates Programme was reviewed and replaced by the Socrates II Programme that, in turn, was replaced by the Lifelong Learning Programme from 2007 till 2013. See “History of the ERASMUS Programme”, European Commission, accessed May 5, 2016, http://web.archive.org/web/20130404063516/http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/history_en.htm. Finally, in 2014 the ERASMUS Lifelong Learning Programme was incorporated in the Erasmus+ project, a programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe. In this thesis, the term “ERASMUS stay” will be used to describe the students’ study experience abroad, regardless of the official denomination of the actual programme they took part in. The official denomination of the programme is in this case a mere bureaucratic matter and it does not affect the actual experience of the students.


favourite destinations of German students were Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Turkey.\footnote{“Statistics. Germany Factsheet”}

This brief overview of the numbers and figures concerning the development of the ERASMUS Programme should suffice to explain the importance of the EU student mobility programme and to estimate its impact on millions of students’ academic experiences and personal development.

As the official objectives of the ERASMUS Programmes also make clear, the ERASMUS Programme is meant to go beyond the plain academic exchange and aims at becoming a fundamental step in every student’s personal growth process. For this reason, increasingly often partner universities commit to developing an extra-academic offer for the ERASMUS students, in order to give them the chance to get to know local and other international students, to take part in local initiatives, and to get to know the host country. Such activities are often coordinated and organised by associations such as the Erasmus Students Network (ESN).\footnote{Further information about the history and goals of the organisation available on their website http://esn.org/, accessed June 11, 2016.}

Of course, it is important to bear in mind that no sweeping generalisation can be made: which activities to undertake and with whom to hang out during the ERASMUS stay is first and foremost a matter of personal choice by each student. Conducting research among (former) ERASMUS students means thus to take into account the specificity of their individual experiences, nevertheless, at the same time it is also possible to expect that such experiences may be structured in a similar way.

### 2.1.2 Definition of the term “experience”

Before moving to the analysis of transnational study mobility in terms of impact on the individuals’ self-understanding, it is advisable to step back and consider reflection of the key-term “experience”, which recurs frequently throughout this thesis in expressions such as “ERASMUS experience”, “the student’s experience abroad”, and “transnational study experience”.

The word “experience” is a flexible term and it is often used (and at times even abused) without much critical reflection. According to the Oxford Dictionary, it has at least three different meanings and can thus indicate: 1) “practical contact with and observation of facts or events”, 2) “the knowledge or skill acquired by a period of
practical experience of something, especially that gained in a particular profession”, and
3) “an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone”. In this context, the term “experience” was adopted in its third acceptance, to indicate a situation which is expected to have an impact on the individual who is living it himself.

In their book “The Anthropology of Experience”, anthropologists Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner developed an interesting reading of the concept of “experience” that further helps to define this term. They begin distinguishing between “experience” and “an experience”. While ordinary experiences consist of a passive acceptance of events in their succession, an experience, as it may be the ERASMUS experience, stands out from the ordinary and is a “distinguishable, isolable sequence[s] of external events and internal responses to them such as initiations into new lifeways.”

Despite being often regarded as idiosyncratic because of their individual character, the same experience may also be shared by a certain number of other individuals in similar circumstances. An experience has thus a double meaning: it “[...] is, at one and the same time, illustrative of what individuals do and of the conventional patterns of culturally learned and interpreted behavior that makes them understandable to others.”

In the context of this thesis, the use of the word “experience” in expressions referring to a period of study abroad wants to highlight the following aspects:

- The fact that the ERASMUS stay is expected to have an impact on the students;
- The extra-ordinary nature of the ERASMUS stay as a period which stands out from the students’ routine at their home university;
- The encompassing character of the ERASMUS stay that is not limited to a situation of academic exchange, but it rather affects diverse aspects of the students’ life;
- The fact that every student approaches the ERASMUS stay in his/her own personal way, but at the same time similarities and patterns between different experiences can be found.

15 Ibid., 49.
2.1.3 ERASMUS Programme as framework for transnational study mobility
The complex social phenomenon of transnationalism is based on the idea of a decline in the social significance of national borders with a subsequent growing interconnectivity between individuals and groups.\(^{16}\) The notion of transnationalism was conceptualized in the 1990s to describe the relatively recent migration movements from Central America to the industrial societies in North America and Western Europe.\(^{17}\) The concept of transnationalism is now commonly used to refer to a “new kind of migrating population […] composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies”.\(^{18}\) Such migrants live, work and are embedded in the social dynamics of their host countries, but at the same time they are also still linked to their home environment.

Victor Roudometof discerns different levels of interconnectedness across national borders, on which transnational experiences can develop.\(^{19}\) Besides the “transnational communities” formed by the groups of immigrants briefly described above, there are in fact also the so-called “transnational social spaces”, which are constructed through recurrent social practices taking place between actors in different nation-states.\(^{20}\) In this case, international migration is not required and the transactions can happened thanks to a vast array of expedients and situations ranging from the use of modern means of communication to different types of international tourism, as well as work done by international organizations and non-governmental groups.\(^{21}\)

As Vertovec observed, the concept of transnationalism has been used (and sometimes abused) to describe a very broad range of phenomena, from the diaspora of entire ethnic groups to the experiences of travelers, from touristic holidays to the migration of specific groups – such as students.\(^{22}\) The movement of students between countries is nowadays a mass movement. In Europe every year more than 200,000 European students spend up to two semesters studying abroad thanks to the ERASMUS

\(^{19}\) Roudometof, “Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization”, 116.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 119.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Vertovec, "Transnationalism and Identity", 576.
Exchange students thus constitute a significant migrating population which operates in a transnational context.

Traditionally, when talking about transnational study experiences, scholars tend to focus more on degree-seeking students rather than on students who study abroad for a short, limited period of time (such as ERASMUS students). In this regard, Gargano asserts that

unlike students who study abroad for a semester to pursue short-term specialized educational sojourns, undergraduate degree-seeking students are grounded in multiple social spaces for substantial periods of time, travelling to and from contexts of origin and campuses abroad over a period of several years. […] Undergraduate degree-seeking international students simultaneously remain family members in contexts of origin, while attending classes, engaging in campus activities, and interacting with local communities abroad, thereby building and maintaining social networks that transcend national borders.

It is undeniable that in most cases short-term stays such as the one offered by the ERASMUS Programme only allow students to superficially get in contact with the society of the host country, but it is nevertheless also true that all the other features listed by Gargano can be found in such programmes as well. During their ERASMUS stay abroad, students tend to maintain the ties with their families either returning home once in while or through more or less regular Skype calls. In this way, they contribute to creating what Roudometof defined as “transnational spaces”. At the same time, the students also take part in the university life of the host country, and build transnational and durable social networks with locals and with other international students. Moreover, the limited duration of the ERASMUS stays may motivate the students to engage in as many extra-curricular activities and spontaneous travels as possible in order to get to know the host country and its culture.

2.2 Transnational student mobility as a field of research

Studies on international higher education and theories on globalization and transnationalism have long intersected on the field of transnational education. The term

23 Ibid.
25 Gargano, “(Re)conceptualizing International Student Mobility”, 336.
“transnational education” covers all those situations in which an “[…] education is delivered by an institution based in one country to students located in another”.26 This phenomenon has been approached from many different angles, but mostly focused on the forms and consequences of transnational study programmes, e.g. their economic implications, the position of transnational students in the job market, the role of different nations as home or host countries of international students and transnational programmes,27 rather than on the experiences of the students themselves. In the following sections some studies that approached the issue placing the students and the complexity of their experiences in the forefront will be analysed.

For most students who take part in a transnational exchange programme, the sojourn abroad is their first time living for a considerable period of time away from home. While maintaining ties with their families and friends, students have to come to grips with cultural differences, different sets of values and beliefs, constant social interaction with both locals and other international people. This process may be perceived as more or less unsettling and challenging depending on each student’s attitude and ability to adapt to new environments.28 In any case, those social dynamics typical of transnational study sojourns have been proved to affect the students’ perception of the self.29

2.2.1 International students as actors in transnational social fields

In comparison with other migrant groups, transnational students are more likely to establish closer contacts and friendships with both people from the host country and

other international students. At the same time, however, due to the temporary character of their stay they also tend to remain in close touch with their families and friends at home. Transnational students can thus be said to be involved in the social activities of both their home and host societies. In her article “(Re)conceptualizing International Student Mobility. The Potential of Transnational Social Fields”, Terra Gargano analyses the transnational networks that are constructed, kept and developed by international students.

Gargano assumes a critical position towards the existing literature on international student mobility research that fails at portraying the complexity of the students’ experiences, as it “focused on nationality and is simultaneously uniformed by the intersections of salient identities such as class, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, and gender.” She also advocates a different approach that gives voice to the students and takes the different facets of their experiences into account. For this reason, a qualitative approach is preferable over a quantitative approach, as it allows the researcher to “adopt a lens that does not examine national trends or statistics, but illuminates students voices and the impact of cultural flows and processes on student-inhabited transnational spaces, identity negotiations, and networks of association”. The lens through which Gargano examined the students’ experiences abroad is the theory of transnational social fields elaborated by Fouron and Schiller. According to this theory, a transnational social field is “an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks that extends across the borders of two or more nation-states and that incorporates its participants in the day-to-day activities of social reproduction in these various locations”. Applying the idea of transnational social field to the study of international student mobility thus allows for a recognition of “simultaneity in localities and multiplicity in identities” while observing the flow of students and the building of networks across national borders. By actively participating in different social contexts in both the home and the host country, transnational students constantly construct and negotiate their identity(ies). Recognising the students as actors in a transnational social

31 Gargano, “(Re)conceptualizing International Student Mobility”, 340.
32 Ibid., 341.
33 Ibid., 332.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 332
36 Ibid., 331.
space is a first and fundamental step towards the understanding of this meaning-making process and sheds light on “the implications of past, present and future on identity construction”.\textsuperscript{37}

The concept of transnational social fields is important because it highlights the interconnectedness of home-host environments and the role of the students as actors in both social spaces. It supports the idea (and actually directly suggests it) that what happens during the stay abroad may influence the experiences at home and vice versa. Looking at the European context, it can be said that the ERASMUS Programme contributes in creating a transnational social field by bringing together students from different countries and promoting their socialisation with the population of the host country. As result, the established intercultural networks generate transnational social fields where the students can find “spaces for exchange, organisation and transformation of ideas, practices and social networks”.\textsuperscript{38}

\subsection*{2.2.2 Impact of the ERASMUS Programme on European identity}

Pinpointing the role of the ERASMUS Programme in creating transnational social fields across Europe reinforces the idea described in the first section of the chapter that the study sojourns taking place within the ERASMUS Programme framework can be considered as transnational study experiences despite their limited duration.

The ERASMUS Programme and its effects on the socio-economic situation in Europe have been the focus of several research efforts in the last twenty years. Although taking different approaches, the overall goal of these studies is to assess to what extent the ERASMUS Programme has reached its goals as they were defined in the founding document by the Council.

Some research projects aim at evaluating the impact of the ERASMUS Programme on the EU economic market, whether or not the regulated exchange of students and teaching staff has successfully fostered the “development of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at Community level”.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 341.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 332.
\textsuperscript{39}Council Decision (EU) 87/327/EEC, 166/222.
Other studies are instead more focused on the students’ experiences and on the social impact of the ERASMUS Programme especially in relation to the process of “strengthen[ing] the interaction between citizens in different member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People’s Europe”. Building upon Karl Deutsch’s theory of social communication, scholars hypothesised that the increased interaction between Europeans fostered by the ERASMUS Programme may strengthen EU identity from below. Several studies have been undertaken to test this hypothesis, and the outcomes have been very diverse. Some support the positive effect Erasmus has on European identity. In one of the most recent studies on the topic, Kristine Mitchell collected data about the ERASMUS stays of 1,729 students from 28 universities in six countries by means of a two-wave online survey to test her hypothesis about the role of the ERASMUS Programme in the construction and strengthening of a common European identity. Her quantitative analysis show that participation in an ERASMUS exchange is significantly and positively correlated with changes in both identification as European and identification with Europe. Furthermore, the data underscore the significance of cross-border interaction and cognitive mobilization in explaining identity change: transnational contact during the exchange is positively related to change in both dimensions of European identity.

Others doubt the relationship between ERASMUS exchange and European identity or suggest the correlation to be rather small. In his article “Cross-border mobility and European identity: The effectiveness of intergroup contact during the ERASMUS year abroad” Emmanuel Sigalas explains how participation in an

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40 Ibid.
43 Christof van Mol. “ERASMUS Student Mobility and the Discovery of New European Horizons”. In The ERASMUS Phenomenon – Symbol of a New European Generation?, edited by Benjamin Feyen and Ewa Krzaklewksa, 105-126. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013.
ERASMUS exchange actually has little if none impact on the students’ sense of EU identity as they had experienced the feeling of being European already before the period abroad. Sigalas also performed a quantitative study and its longitudinal survey involved two samples of ERASMUS students (ingoing and outgoing) who studied abroad during the academic year 2003-04 and a control sample of sedentary students. His results indicate a modest impact of the ERASMUS stay on the students’ European identity, in many cases also caused by limited interactions with locals due to a high concentration of co-nationals at many universities.

Regardless of their final conclusions, these studies prove that study experiences abroad have an impact on the student’s meaning-making process. The fact that transnational mobility has an influence on the creation of a supranational identity allows ample room for the possibility that the same dynamics and experiences abroad, which are expected to influence this process, may also have an impact on the student’s self-understanding in relation to their national identity.

### 2.2.3 Impact of transnational study mobility on national identity

Being the existing literature on ERASMUS students and self-understanding more concerned with the construction of a European identity rather than with the impact on the students’ national identity, we have once again to move overseas to find some relevant literature on the topic. The article “Encountering an American Self: Study Abroad and National Identity” by Nadine Dolby is a good example of research in this sense, as she argues that “study abroad provides not only the possibility of encountering the world, but of encountering oneself – particularly one’s national identity – in a context that may stimulate new questions and new formulations of that self.” The aim of the study was thus to observe the development and the relevance of national identities in a global context and to assess whether a study experience abroad could lead to the construction of a post-national identity.

Unlike the two studies described in the previous paragraphs, Dolby opted for a qualitative and interpretative approach conducting interviews with 26 American students selected for an exchange semester in Australia. The participants were

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47 Ibid., 249.
48 Ibid., 261.
50 Ibid.
interviewed both before and after their sojourn abroad and they were also contacted via email during the sojourn. All students involved in the research project encountered multiple situations in which the idea of “America” and “USA” was articulated in ways completely different to the ones they had encountered at home. The students’ reactions to such situations were diverse: some firmly refused these new articulations and “retreated to an infantile citizenship”\textsuperscript{52}, while others showed a more open attitude towards these new possibilities and actually reflected on their own position towards the USA and their belonging to American society.\textsuperscript{53} The fact that students, under the influence of situations experienced while study abroad, spent some time reflecting on their national identity does not mean that they necessarily returned home feeling “more American” or “less American” because, as Dolby observes, “national identity is here not simply refused nor strengthened, but rather negotiated and constructed in social contexts that transcend the national borders.”\textsuperscript{54}

The overview of current transnational student mobility literature provided in this section has highlighted the particular position of students as actors in social dynamics in both the home and the host country and also shown that situations encountered abroad can have an impact on the students’ identity construction process. But exactly what are this “situations” students experiences while studying abroad? The encounter with the host country culture and the socialisation with other international students are two of the most important instances that characterise study sojourns abroad.

2.3 Re-interpretation of the self in intercultural environments

Study sojourns abroad are complex and multifaceted experiences where attending courses at the host university accounts only for a small – and sometimes even marginal – part. The encounter with new cultural practices and the socialisation with local and other international individuals is the highlight of their ERASMUS stay for many exchange students. Free from the pressure of their normal peer group (including in the home country) and of the fear of being judged by their family and friends, students abroad are more receptive to stimulation of the new environment and ready to question

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 154
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 151.
themselves.\textsuperscript{55} During the ERASMUS semester(s) students often have the feeling to be living in a bubble completely detached from normal everyday life and this encourages them to experiment with new ideas, new cultures, and new belief systems.\textsuperscript{56}

Mobility, and with it intercultural contact, is believed to be essential to the individuals’ process of identity construction.\textsuperscript{57} By meeting someone or something who is / thinks / acts not like them, students can become aware of who they are.\textsuperscript{58} Exchange programmes such as the ERASMUS Programmes thus constitutes the perfect environment for the students to discuss, negotiate, and re-interpret those beliefs and cultural values previously assimilated at home. The theories presented in the next section will provide a general understanding of the mechanisms behind this processes.

\section*{2.3.1 Culture shock}

Saying goodbye to family and friends to go and study abroad (even if just for one semester) is certainly not easy, and coping with the new life in the host country can be quite a stressful experience for some students. For these reasons, until the Eighties the challenges of studying abroad had been covered in migration literature in relation to mental health and psychological problems.\textsuperscript{59} Contemporary research on international students nowadays develops in the field of social psychology and education, as sojourns abroad are seen more as learning experiences rather than sources of psychological troubles.\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, it is undeniable that individuals abroad may experience discomfort because of the effort required to adapt to the new situation.\textsuperscript{61} Although the ERASMUS Programme fosters student mobility exclusively within Europe, where cultural differences are expected to be quite limited, studies have proven that some forms of culture shock associated to the ERASMUS student’s adaptation process to the host country.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{55} Oborune, “Becoming more European or Global After Student Mobility?”, 5.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Cresswell, \textit{On the Move}, 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{61} Oborune, “Becoming more European or Global After Student Mobility?”, 5.
\end{flushright}
Already in the Fifties, the Finnish-Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg used the term “culture shock” to describe a state of anxiety deriving from an individual’s first intercultural experience. The most typical “symptoms” of culture shock are a feeling of loss of family and friends, a feeling of being rejected by the new culture, confusion in role expectation, confusion in values, feelings, and understanding of the self, anxiety and an inability to cope with the cultural differences.

According to Oberg, the culture shock phenomenon is articulated in different stages (U-curve hypothesis). Initially, individuals are fascinated by the foreign culture. This first positive approach to the new environment is called “honeymoon” and it may last between a few days to up to six months. The second stage is instead characterised by a hostile attitude towards the host country, where everything is perceived as a trouble and a threat. At this point, Oberg explain that the key to go past this phase is to get some knowledge of the local language. This allows the individual to “open the way into the new cultural environment”, even though a superior and martyr-like attitude is usually shown at this stage. Little by little, the new environment ceases to be perceived as foreign and the adjustment to the new culture can be declared completed.

Although the early definition of culture shock given by Oberg considered the phenomenon as a negative, submissive reaction to foreign circumstances, a situation of culture shock does not necessarily lead to a medical condition, but may also result in a learning experience.

While Oberg mainly stressed the emotional reaction of individuals that all of a sudden found themselves completely overwhelmed by living abroad, the “cognitive component” of the phenomenon should not be underestimated.

Culture shock is to be considered as “the process of emerging from the confrontation and implicit comparison between two different cultural realities.”

64 Oborune, “Becoming more European or Global After Student Mobility?”, 6.
67 Ibid., 3.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 4
71 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
discrepancy between the home and the host system is not necessarily expressed in terms of judgment, but rather through the acknowledgment of the relative distance between the two realities.\textsuperscript{75}

Within a social group (may it be broad – as a nation, or narrow – as a family nucleus), members share the meanings and values and interpret a series of events (historical, institutional, cultural, existential etc.) in the same way. These interpretations vary across groups and across cultures. In “The Psychology of Culture Shock”, Furnham explains what happens when individuals from different groups come into contact:

(…) when cultures come into contact, such established ‘verities’ lose their apparent inevitability For instance, when persons from a male-dominated culture find themselves in a society that practices gender equality, the conflict between these two irreconcilable positions spills over into the cognitive workings of both visitors and hosts. It affects how the participants see each other, how they regard themselves, and whether either party will be influenced to change their views as a consequence of the contact.\textsuperscript{76}

Individuals can react differently to the cultural stimulations deriving from a culture shock situation. The attitude shown towards the new environment depends mostly on each student’s “mobility capital”, which takes into account the length and frequency of previous stays abroad, the language skills, the intercultural competences etc.\textsuperscript{77}

While some students firmly refuse the cultural influences of the host country, others completely abandon the culture of origin to assimilate into the new environment.\textsuperscript{78} A third possible approach is to mediate between the two cultures, to negotiate and re-interpret the values of origin vis-à-vis the foreign customs.\textsuperscript{79}

In the experience of ERASMUS students, the term “shock” may be too strong and seem loaded a negative connotation that does not necessarily apply to their experience. As a matter of fact, ERASMUS students usually regard their stay abroad as a fundamental step in their personal growth and show an enthusiastic attitude towards it.\textsuperscript{80} When they do experience some discomfort, this is generally transitory and associated

\textsuperscript{74} Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune, \textit{Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers} (New York: Routledge, 2002), 129.
\textsuperscript{75} Adrian Furnham, “The ABC of ‘culture shock’”, 267.
\textsuperscript{76} Furnham, “The ABC of ‘culture shock’”, 268-269.
\textsuperscript{77} Murphy-Lejeune, \textit{Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe}, 126.
\textsuperscript{78} Furnham, “The ABC of ‘culture shock’”, 269.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 269.
\textsuperscript{80} Murphy-Lejeune, \textit{Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe}, 132.
with the first period right after their arrival in the host country.\textsuperscript{81} In this case, the word “shock” could thus be replaced with more positive terms such as “surprise” or “discovery”, as the culture shock experienced by ERASMUS students is mainly a source of curiosity, which “inspires, brings about revelations, new perspectives on a future which could have been limited.”\textsuperscript{82}

For many students, the ERASMUS stay is their first experience living and studying abroad and they thus try make the most out of it. According to a study on the life of ERASMUS students by the German sociologist Ulrich Teichler, some of the most frequent extra-curricular activities besides academic work are: listening to, watching, reading news about the host country, going to the theatre, to the cinema, to museums, etc., having conversations and discussions with host country students and teaching staff, having conversations with other host country people, travelling around the host country, sport and other leisure activities with host country nationals.\textsuperscript{83} These activities may introduce new perspectives to the students, and at the same time these new situations can trigger a reflection on their self-understanding. Tajfel's social identity theory was used to put these responses into the context of intergroup relations.\textsuperscript{84}

\section*{2.3.2 Social identity theory and formation of stereotypes in intercultural contexts}

During their ERASMUS stay, students do not only have to face a new reality, but they also have to tie bonds with new individuals, whether locals or other international students. This sub-section attempts to shed some light on the complex dynamics regulating socialisation among individuals in intercultural environments. Particular attention is paid to the role stereotypes may play in such contexts.

Identity is constructed in terms of different social contexts and negotiations in the perception of the self.\textsuperscript{85} In intercultural situations this applies particularly to those identities that had been constructed from strictly local social interaction, such as an individual national identity.\textsuperscript{86} A conceptual approach to the issue is suggested by Henri Tajfel with his social identity theory.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{81} Ibid.
\bibitem{82} Ibid., 132-133.
\bibitem{84} Furnham, “The ABC of ‘culture shock’”, 269.
\bibitem{85} Zhou et al., “Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education”, 67.
\bibitem{86} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
According to Tajfel, social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance to that membership.” Social groups do not only provide their members with a set of values and shared meanings, but they also are important sources of pride and self-esteem, as they give individuals a sense of social identity, that is, a sense of belonging to the social world. In order to distinguish themselves from the other (supposedly inferior) social groups, individuals operate a process of social categorisation discerning between in-group (with whom a feeling of affiliation is shared) and out-groups. Tajfel states that the in-group will always try to discriminate against the out-group in order to enhance their status and their self-image. This process often results in the production of stereotypes, which are the result of an exaggerated group categorisation.

Stereotypes are an integral part of intercultural communication and social interaction. Exchange programmes such as the ERASMUS Programme bring students from many different countries together, giving them the possibility to socialize and to build networks. During the first stages of contact, nationality itself becomes often one of the first criteria according to which students categorize each other and upon which they build their relations abroad. As William B. Gudykunst and Michael Harris Bond explain it, “once individuals are categorized, stereotypes may be activated, and the affect and attitudes individuals have toward the members of the other group become salient.”

Already in 1922 Lippmann defined stereotypes as over-simplified pictures of the world, as often unfair and simple generalizations about determined categories of people.

Stereotypes of a specific cultural group towards another are formed in different ways. In their work “Stereotypes”, Hilton and von Hippel broke down the complex psychological mechanism behind the formation of stereotypes and explain how

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
Stereotypes are activated. Individuals of a specific group can be judged by the members of another group either on the basis of previously stored abstract representations (prototypes) of some specific group features, or through individual concrete exemplars (exemplars). Particularly common in intercultural contexts are the so-called “group prototypes”, that is “mental representations consisting of a collection of associations between group labels (e.g. Italians) and the features that are assumed to be true of the group (e.g. a feature of Italians might be ‘romantic’)”. These generalizations can refer to some supposed positive or negative characteristics of a certain group and historical events can also provide materials for the formation of stereotypes.

The feeling of an individual to be constantly victim of stereotyping may be regarded as one of the “symptoms” of culture shock. As already explained in the previous sections, individuals can have different reactions to such situations, and stereotypes can thus trigger a reflection on the self-understanding the same way culture shock does. Stereotypes constitute an integral part of intercultural communication and hence cannot be avoided, however they often come up in situations of superficial contact and/or perceived as jokes, as trivialities and thus pass unnoticed without having any particular impact on the individuals involved.

Chapter 2 examined the role of the ERASMUS Programme as a framework for transnational student mobility in Europe. It was argued that, despite its limited duration, ERASMUS stays can be regarded as transnational study experiences. Being actors in transnational social fields, ERASMUS students remain linked to their country of origin while being socially active in the host country and mediating between the two environments. Recent studies have proven that this kind of transnational study sojourns have an impact on the students´ understanding of the self. At European level, research in

95 Ibid., 241-242.
97 Ibid.
100 Ibid., 244.
101 Sigalas “Cross border mobility and European identity”, 248.
this field focuses on the role of the ERASMUS Programme in creating and strengthening a common EU identity. Overseas, transnational study experiences have also been approached in terms of their effect in terms of reinterpretation of national identity. In conclusion, the theory of culture shock and the formation of stereotypes in contexts of intercultural socialisation were presented to explain some instances that may stimulate a reflection on the self during the stay abroad.

Chapter 3 will present how the research problem was framed within the theoretical and conceptual framework illustrated in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2 and will discuss the research methodology in detail.
CHAPTER 3 - Research Question and Methodology

Given the theoretical background developed in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2, this chapter will start with an explanation of how the research question was framed. The attention will then move to the presentation of the methodological approach and methods and to the justification of the methodological choices.

3.1 Framing the Research Question

The two previous chapters had the function to analyse the two main issues at the heart of this thesis, namely German collective memory and transnational study experiences. Chapter 1 explored the concept of collective memory with regard to the delicate relationship between German society and the memories of the Third Reich and of the Holocaust in Germany. Particular attention was given to the dynamics of interpretation and negotiation of collective memory through social interaction in family and school context and to the response of younger generations. Collective memory constitutes a powerful social bond, as it helps strengthening a group’s identity, and it cannot exist outside of a social contexts and/or without social interaction.¹ The vast majority of researchers approach this matter from a domestic point of view, studying the construction and the negotiation of collective memory in situations where Germans interact with other Germans in Germany. In other words, this social interaction takes place in a “home environment”, where, to a certain extent, all the social actors share similar values and traditions.

However, nowadays individuals – especially young people – tend to get more and more socially involved also in foreign environments. In this context, Chapter 2 explained how European exchange create transnational networks within the framework of the ERASMUS Programme. The theory of transnational social fields suggests that transnational students are simultaneously embedded as social actors in both the home and the host country. Due to this “simultaneity in localities and multiplicity in identities”², the experiences students have in the host country may influence their behaviour towards the home environment and vice versa.

The cultural shock theory and the social identity theory as an explanation of the formation of stereotypes in contexts of intercultural communication provided further evidence for the fact that living and socialising in a foreign country – also in contexts of transnational study mobility - may introduce new perspectives to the students, and at the same time these new situations can trigger a reflection on their self-understanding.

These premises led to the formulation of the following central research question: how do German students adapt, negotiate and re-interpret German collective memory of the Nazi past in the light of their ERASMUS experience? To narrow down the focus of the study, the main research question was broken down into three sub-questions. The sub-questions were articulated through an inductive approach from the theoretical background and each of them focuses on a particular issue at stake. A description of the three sub-questions together with the elaboration of the relative theoretical assumptions is provided below.

Regarding “German collective memory” – The fact that German collective memory of the Nazi crimes is characterized by a constant tension between communicative and cultural memory seems to be an established notion among several scholars. Some talk about “tension between official memory and vernacular memory”, others about “asymmetry” or even “disjuncture”, some more about “dissonances”. However, it is important not to reduce German collective memory to a sort of competition communicative versus cultural memory. The idea of memory contests describes the recent pluralization of German collective memory discourse, pointing out the fact that family memories often provide alternative interpretations of the past, which may challenge the institutionalized versions. However, the fact that the two interpretations of the past differ in terms of representations and meanings does not necessarily mean that this discrepancy is perceived by the individual in a negative way. The tension can trigger a memory contest, but it can also simply get resolved with an acknowledgment of both versions. The relationship between the two memories may also vary from individual to individual, as especially communicative memory in family context is subject to many different variables (some young Germans may have never had the chance to talk about the topic with their grandparents or sometimes even grand-

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3 Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse, 7.
5 Mary Fulbrook, German National Identity after the Holocaust (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 18.
grandparents, the older family members may have refused to share their stories, etc.). This reflection leads to question like: what kind of relationship is there between cultural and communicative memory? How do you young German negotiate between the two?

Regarding the “ERASMUS experience” – Even more than for their value as academic experiences, ERASMUS stays are known for offering to the students the possibility to get to know a foreign country and to socialize with people from all over Europe and the world. Besides the academic component of lectures and seminars, more leisurely activities such as museum visits, trips in the host country, concerts, parties etc. are activities that belong to every ERASMUS experience. Taking part in these events, students get to know the host country’s reality and tradition and they encounter different articulations of meanings and values. The theory of culture shock provides an explanation for the different reactions individuals may have when confronted with a foreign environment. How do German students react to situations presenting new meanings of the Nazi past? Do these instances abroad trigger a deeper reflection on the Nazi past? Do they affect the tension (or balance) between communicative and cultural memory in the single individuals? Can such experiences be considered an “instrument of critical reflection”? Stereotyping as mechanism typical of intercultural communication deserves a separate mention. Nationality becomes often one of the first criteria according to which students categorize each other and upon which they build their relations abroad. Stereotypes can be constructed upon historical events/figures that are perceived to have shaped the character of a nation. The Nazi regime and the Holocaust have without any doubt left a deep scar in German history and it cannot be ruled out that they may be the first association some people have when they hear of Germany. This consideration thus leads to the following sub-questions: are German students abroad victims of stereotypes (especially of the kind previously described)? If so, how do students react to them?

Regarding the “adapt[ion], negotiat[ion] and re-interpretat[ion] process” – At the same time, collective memory is created by a social group and it contributes in creating the social group itself. Given that by its very nature memory (in any of its articulations) is not monolithic but is open to a virtually unlimited amount of interpretations, Germans in Germany usually encounter no problems in articulating

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6 Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse, 7.
7 Halbwachs, On collective memory, 51
collective memory because its terms are recognised by the group they are in (German society). In this context, the following questions arise: what happens when Germans are removed from German society and live/study abroad? How do they react to the new beliefs and terms (which may contradict some of the German values and traditions) of the host country? Do the new environment and the socialisation with individuals from different cultural backgrounds have an impact on their perception of German collective memory of the Nazi past?

3.2 Methodology

This section will present in detail all the methodological choices concerning this study. Particular attention will be given to the selection of the methodological approach and the research method, to the description of the sample group and research site, to the design of the surveys, to the research implementation, to the data analysis techniques and finally to the research assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and scope. All the methodological choices will also be justified.

3.2.1 Methodological approach

Given the research problem described in the previous section, the most appropriate way to approach the issue is through a qualitative social research.

The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex and richer data about how people experience the given research issue. Qualitative research seeks to explore phenomena and it provides information about behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Researchers collect data with the primary intention of developing themes and they approach the given issues from a constructivist perspective (for instance to explore the multiple meanings of individual experiences and socially/historically constructed meanings).

In her article “(Re)conceptualizing International Student Mobility. The Potential of Transnational Social Fields”, Terra Gargano addresses a critique towards the existing mainly quantitative research on transnational students, which in her opinion is more

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9 Ibid., 8-19
interested in national trends and statistics, and she advocates for a qualitative approach to illuminate all the different aspects of the students’ voices and experiences.

### 3.2.2 Research method

Among all the qualitative research methods, a suitable approach to this very specific study could be a qualitative survey. Surveys usually focus on precise characteristics of a group of individuals and they analyse a sample of members to investigate variations in the population. Surveys are considered “a way to securing reliable information that can usefully be plugged into comparative contexts, in order to infer general patterns” and qualitative surveys are particularly recommended for the exploration of meanings and experiences. In this case, qualitative surveys will provide rich data about how the experience of German ERASMUS students abroad shapes their perception, adaption, negotiation, and re-interpretation of German collective memory of the Nazi past.

The surveys were drafted through a theory-driven process that helped come to grips with the diversity to be studied. Given the limited amount of time to complete the research, open, inductive surveys did not seem to be a feasible option, as they require the interpretation of a larger amount of data in order to identify relevant dimensions and categories.

Qualitative surveys are a rather underrated and undefined research method in methodological literature and they are often criticized for their simple design. Nevertheless, qualitative studies may become a useful tool to “explore the views of participants as expressed in their own words”.

In-depth interviews are a more common qualitative research method that could have been applied to this research. Interviews are ideal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences and they allow for a more

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12 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 2-3
16 Ibid., 3.
17 Ibid., 1.
18 Ibid., 5.
flexible approach, excluding/integrating some elements or changing the wording of the questions based on the previous answers of the participants.

However, the decision to opt for written, qualitative surveys was made in order to avoid two potential complications. The first issue refers to the creation of a possible language barrier between German interviewees and a non-native German speaker interviewer. From the very beginning, it has been decided to conduct the research in German, to allow the participants to express themselves in the best way possible. A non-native German interviewer may not be able to perceive the different linguistic (especially nuances on the spot, and this may result in misunderstanding and/or situation of embarrassment, which can seriously affect the reliability of the interviews. Secondly, the topic of the surveys is a sensitive one, and some participants may prefer to compile written surveys rather than sharing their personal experiences and feelings with a stranger.

3.2.3 Research site and sample group
The survey targeted German students who have spent at least one semester on ERASMUS. For reasons of feasibility, it was decided to restrict the research to the students of the Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. The students’ academic background may play a fundamental role in the way in which both the discourses about the Nazi past and the stay abroad are approached. Due to the limited time available for the implementation of the research, it would have been extremely difficult to find and analyse a representative sample form each faculty in a proper way. Focusing on a specific category of students thus avoided the risk of comparing apples and oranges in rushed and partial research. Moreover, it was possible to get into contact with students through one single office in a quicker, more effective and direct way. As history students may also already have a general knowledge of the concepts and themes at stake, they may be facilitated in critically reflecting on their personal memory contests and are thus more likely to provide exhaustive and rich responses. Lastly, the partner universities of the Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte are well distributed all over Europe (United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, France, Hungary, Slovakia, Turkey, and Czech Republic\(^19\)) and, in theory,

\(^{19}\)Further information about the ERASMUS destinations for students of the Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte is available on the Georg-August-Universität-Göttingen website: [http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/5398.html](http://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/5398.html), accessed February 29, 2016.
this geographic diversification should have provided interesting data on how the students’ experience may change depending on the country the Host University is situated in.

The exact size of the sample group was not decided beforehand, a practice that it is actually common in this kind of research projects where decisions in this regard are made as the research proceeds. Nevertheless, the objective of getting at least two students per each partner university involved in the study was set, in order to achieve the above mentioned geographic diversification.

3.2.4 Design of the surveys
As already mentioned before, the surveys were designed through a mostly deductive, theory-driven process. The research question and the theoretical concepts involved were deconstructed and re-formulated in an easy-to-understand way for the students. Terms such as “collective memory” and “cultural shock” were thus avoided, in order not to create confusion among the participants.

The survey was subdivided into three sections. In the first section, participants were asked to provide some general information regarding their ERASMUS stay. In the second section, they had to elaborate a critical reflection on how the memory of Nazi crimes was approached both at school and at home, with a particular focus on those images that remained impressed into their minds the most. The last section aimed at analyzing the students’ personal responses to some situations typical of the ERASMUS stays (listening to, watching, reading news about the host country, going to the cinema/theater/concerts, having conversations with foreigner/local students and people, travelling the host country, and visiting museums or other cultural institutions among the most frequently cited activities) in terms of perception, adaption, negotiation and re-interpretation of German collective memory related to their own personal, inner “memory contests”.

At the very beginning of the survey, students were provided with a general overview of the study’s content, purpose and modality, as well as with a brief presentation of the researcher’s academic profile. The entire survey was originally drafted in English and then the final version was translated into German.

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The inquiries were structured as open, semi-structured questions, to allow the participants to express themselves and describe their experiences. Each question was also contextualized by a couple of introductory lines that were carefully formulated in order to inform the participants of the inquiry’s focus without influencing them and leading them towards certain answers.

Before being distributed to the potential participants, the final version of the survey was tested on a group of German MA-level students in the field of History and Social Sciences and consequently some minor changes were made especially regarding the lexical formulation of some questions.

3.2.5 Implementation of the research

Students of the Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte who have spent at least one semester on ERASMUS were contacted via e-mail through the home coordinators of their host university. A first e-mail was sent around on April 13, 2016. Hereby, students were informed about the study and were asked to get in contact with the researcher at the given e-mail address to indicate their availability in taking part in it. Those students who showed interest in the research were then sent the survey to complete via e-mail.

Due to the low number of respondents, on May 6, 2016 a reminder about the research was sent to all the potential participants of Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte together with a copy of the survey.

At this stage, four surveys had been collected, and all participants turned out to have spent their ERASMUS semester(s) at the University of York. In order to try to ensure a better geographic diversification, it was decided to open the study also to the participation of students from other institutes and seminars within the Faculty of Philosophy at the Georg-August-Universität-Göttingen (as, to a certain extent, they share a common background with History students and may thus show the same sensibility towards the topic). On May 24, 2016, a copy of the survey was forwarded via e-mail to the ERASMUS coordinators of the whole Faculty of Philosophy, with the request to inform their students about it. However, this new step proved to be

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21 The seminars and institutes belonging to the Faculty of Philosophy at the Georg-August-Universität-Göttingen are the following: Althistorisches Seminar, Archäologisches Institut, Seminar für Arabistik/Islamwissenschaft, Christliche Archäologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte, Seminar für Deutsche Philologie, Finnisch-ungrisches Seminar, Seminar für Indologie und Tibetologie, Seminar für Klassische Philologie, Institut für Kulturanthropologie/Europäische Ethnologie, Kunstgeschichtliches Seminar, Musikwissenschaftliches Seminar, Philosophisches Seminar, Seminar für Romanische Philologie, Skandinavisches Seminar, Seminar für Slavische Philologie, Seminar für Turkologie und Zentralasienkunde.
unsuccessful and, on June 11, 2016, a total of seven participants had taken part in the questionnaire.

Due to time constraints, it was decided not to actively seek for further participants and to work with the available data. However, a small sample size does not necessarily undermine the relevance and credibility of a research project. In the words of the sociologists Mira Crouch and Heather McKenzie, in research efforts aiming at exploring particular life experiences, “respondents are ‘cases’, or instances of states, rather than (just) individuals who are bearers of certain designated properties (or ‘variables’)”. This implies that every case should be equally taken into account and highlights the relative unimportance of the total number.

3.2.6 Data analysis

Qualitative surveys are primarily descriptive research designs. To get the most out of the participants’ written answers, researchers need to analyse and interpret the data.

According to Creswell, the best way to analyse qualitative data is to identify themes that will help answering the research questions. Thematic analysis constitutes a possible approach to the data set. As an independent qualitative descriptive approach, it is mainly described as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”, which allows the researchers to gain insight and knowledge from the data set.

Thematic analysis is closely related to phenomenology, as it also focuses on the subjectivity of human experience. Participants are invited to discuss the issue in their own words, free from the constrains of pre-structured questions typical of quantitative studies. A possible alternative approach to the analysis of the data set was the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Thematic analysis and IPA are carried out in a similar way, namely through the identification of codes and themes throughout the data set. In IPA, however, the analysis proceeds “bottom-up”, meaning that the

23 Ibid., 493
codes are generated from the data and not in an inductive way. Moreover, participants are selected based on their expertise in the phenomenon being studied. In the context of this study, participants were accepted regardless of their ERASMUS experiences having contributed in developing a reflection on the Nazi past or not. This thesis aims rather at explore the issue, in order to capture its most typical characteristics. For these reasons, IPA might be a suitable approach for the analysis of the data gathered in a follow-up study among those participants who stated that their ERASMUS stay had an influence on their own perception of the Nazi past.

The surveys were printed out in an anonymous way, named after the student’s host university and ordered according to the date they were returned to the researchers (YORK 1, YORK 2 and so on).

In the first stage of analysis, the students’ answers were reviewed for the purpose of identifying codes to start the in-depth analysis. Codes may highlight either semantic themes or latent themes (or both). Semantic themes describe the explicit and surface meaning of the data, without going beyond the participants’ written answers. They help the researcher describe the important themes, but lack depth and complexity. On the contrary, latent themes identify underlying patterns and ideas. This requires much interpretation of the data by the researcher, who may decide to focus on a limited number of questions across the set of data.

Both semantic and latent codes were identified in the answers provided by the participants. The codification was carried out manually. The answers were divided into themes by colouring and adding commentaries. Similar codes were then merged into wider themes and then extracted and analysed.

Themes were identified through a mixed theory- and data-driven process. Some themes were suggested by the theoretical background discussed in the first two chapters, while some others were inferred from the data in a deductive way, allowing the

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28 Ibid.
29 This possibility and further suggestions for future research will be discussed in the Conclusion.
31 Ibid.
researcher to develop a typology of how students’ perception of the Nazi past is affected by the intercultural experiences they had during the ERASMUS stay.

In many qualitative studies the researcher tries to break down complex social realities and make them easier to explain and understand.\textsuperscript{33} Typology is the result of a grouping process, where a phenomenon is categorised in different groups according to presence/absence of one attribute or a combination of attributes.\textsuperscript{34} Due to the small size of the sample group, it was not possible to develop a proper and complete typology,\textsuperscript{35} as the data collected are not sufficient to prove causal relations between attributes and to test them against deviant and/or contradicting cases. Nevertheless, some attributes seemed to emerge in more than one case, allowing the researcher to develop a sort of “case history” of how German students negotiate German collective memory in the light of their ERASMUS experience.

The analysis is subdivided into two parts. In the descriptive analysis, each theme is presented using a combination of analyst narrative and illustrative data extracts. Relevant issues were then approached moving from a merely descriptive level to a more interpretative one, anchoring a cross-cutting analytic reading of the themes in the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2.

3.2.7 Research assumptions

This thesis is based on a constructivist worldview. Social constructivism is based on the fact that both reality and knowledge exist as socially constructed by groups and individuals.

While conducting the research, some assumptions were taken into account, both concerning the formulation of the research questions and the methodological choices. First, it was assumed that the memory of the Nazi crimes constitutes such an important part of German collective memory that every German individual was confronted with it at a certain point of his/her life. Concerning the selection of the sample group, it was supposed that history students (and students from other institutes within the Faculty of Philosophy as well) tend to reflect upon the past more intensively than other students and that the past consequentially has a greater weight in their own present experiences.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 2
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 5 for an overview of the different steps involved in the process.
The last assumption regards the compilation of the surveys. It was expected that the participants provided truthful, honest and accurate answers that were based on their own personal experiences.

3.2.8 Research delimitations

The study was conducted among German students of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Georg-August-Universität-Göttingen, who during their studies spent at least one semester abroad thanks to the ERASMUS Programme. The analysis of the data is thus to be understood within this specific context, which was selected for practical reason due to its proximity to the researcher.

A limit of qualitative surveys (if compared to interviews, for instance) is the lack of direct contact with the participants. During an interview, the researcher can infer important information also by observing the interviewees’ attitude and body language, and by listening to their pauses and the tone of their voices.

3.2.9 Research limitations

The most striking limitation of this research is probably the small size of the sample group. Despite the constant efforts made by the researcher to get more participant involved into the study, students did not show much interest in it. This diffuse disinterest may have several different causes, ranging from a reluctance to address a potentially sensitive topic such as the memory of the Nazi past to a lack of time in a period of intense academic work. Due to the small size of the sample, the results of this study are not intended to be generalised to the population of German students at large, but instead they are intended to describe the experiences and beliefs of a group of students.

A further limitation of this study consists in the fact that it mainly relies on self-reported data. Even though participants were asked to answer the inquiries in a truthful and honest way, it cannot be totally ruled out that the answers provided in the surveys may have been skewed by the misunderstanding of some enquiries, by the students’ concern about the social conformity of their answer, or also by their attempt to please the researcher.

Qualitative research is also easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases. In this case, it cannot be ruled out that a non-native German speaker researcher may have misunderstood some answers. Moreover, the personal experiences the researcher
had abroad as an exchange student herself may have influenced the way the data were approached and processed.

As the surveys collect the data at a single point in time, they are unable to track changes in a determinate issue. In this case, students were explicitly asked to reflect upon how their perception of German collective memory before and after the ERASMUS stay, that is, they were asked to evaluate their change on their own. If on the one hand this method shed some light on how this perception changed over time, on the other hand students’ themselves may have been influenced by their current opinions while assessing their pre-ERASMUS considerations about the Nazi past.

This chapter had a double focus: formulation of the research questions and methodological approach. It was explained how the research question was framed on the basis of the literature review and of the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapters and how it was successively articulated into several sub-questions. All the relevant methodological choices were also presented and justified.

The next chapter will start providing a more detailed overview of the sample group and will then present the results of the data analysis.
CHAPTER 4 - Data Analysis: Main Findings

Chapter 4 presents the most relevant findings of the thematic analysis. First, the sample group is presented to the reader by summing up the most salient information about each participant’s ERASMUS stay. Then, the report is subdivided into two sections. The first part provides a detailed account of the themes emerged through the analysis of the data set. In the second part, which has a more interpretative character, the themes are discussed in combination to one-another and anchored to the theoretical framework provided in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2. Finally, a further reflection on the examined age cohort is elaborated through the analysis of three newspaper articles and one movie about the experiences of young Germans abroad and the influence on their personal stances towards the remembrance of the Nazi past.

4.1 Presentation of the sample group

The sample group consists of seven students of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. They voluntarily decided to take part to the research, filled in the survey electronically and then they returned it to the researcher. As the surveys were anonymous, participants were identified according to their respective ERASMUS host university. The following chart provides an overview of the details relative to the participants’ ERASMUS stay (host country, host university, academic year, duration).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Host country</th>
<th>Host university</th>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YORK 1</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YORK 2</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YORK 3</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YORK 4</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>University of York</td>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNKNOWN</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPENHAGEN 1</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Københavns Universitet</td>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRAGUE 1</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Univerzita Karlova v Praze</td>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All participants studied abroad for one semester between 2012 and 2016, and only one sojourn lasted one year. Only two students did not spend their ERASMUS semester
at the University of York and went respectively to the Københavns Universitet (Denmark) and to the Univerzita Karlova v Praze (Czech Republic).

Five out of seven participants completed the full questionnaire. UNKNOWN did not fill in the survey at all, however he\(^1\) wrote an e-mail to the researcher to inform her that he was aware of the research project, but he saw no point in taking part to it as he was by no means confronted with the Nazi past during his ERASMUS stay. Despite the lack of the most basic information, this testimony was also taken into account during the data analysis. Similarly, YORK 4 stated that he had no relevant experience abroad, but in this case the first part of the survey was filled in. It is important to point out that YORK 4 is the participant who completed the ERASMUS semester the longest ago during the academic year 2012-2013, therefore it is possible that he was not able to recall his ERASMUS stay in great detail.

4.2 Descriptive analysis

This section provides a description of the data collected through the surveys and it presents the themes emerged during the analysis. For the sake of clarity and in the interest of a better visualisation of the issue, the analysis is organised into sub-sections according to the focus of the different inquiries.

4.2.1 Collective memory of the Nazi past

In the second section of the survey (the first one focused on general information about the ERASMUS stay), participants were asked to describe how the Nazi crimes and their legacy were discussed both at home and at school. In this case, the themes reoccurring in their answers show not only how the topic was approached in the two social contexts, but also which elements were internalized by the students and thus shaped their personal perception of the Nazi past the most.

4.2.1.1 Cultural memory: approaching the Nazi past at school

In principle, all students had similar experiences in this sense. The themes\(^2\) that emerged from their answers are: cross-cutting nature of the issue, predominance of the transfer of

\(^1\) As the surveys were conducted in an anonymous way, it is not possible to know whether a specific participant is a man or a woman. For reasons of convenience, the male pronoun “he” will be used while referring to a single participant.

\(^2\) To emphasize and highlight the themes throughout the chapter, their denominations are written in italics.
knowledge, dichotomy of victims versus perpetrators, development of an emotional approach, variety of didactic tools, and inadequacy of teachers’ approach.

German students started being confronted with the Nazi past between the 6th and the 10th grade. Even before being approached during history classes, the Holocaust and the Third Reich were often the thematic focus of German classes. Some participants stated that the topic was also often discussed during religion classes, but they did specify neither the content nor the modalities. All students seemed to agree on the cross-cutting nature of the Nazi past as lesson topic in German high schools.

YORK 2: “All in all, it was an omnipresent topic, not just in history classes.”

All participants specified the fact that history classes were mainly organised around a process of knowledge transfer from the teachers to the students. The history of the Third Reich was broken down into a series of topical events and/or specific aspects (e.g. Hitler’s rise to power, the Kristallnacht, the persecutions of the Jews and other minority groups, Nazi propaganda, foreign policy and expansionism, consequences of the war), and explained to the class in chronological order and with a cause-effect relation.

Despite this apparent variety in the thematic approaches and perspectives, participants pointed out that in the praxis the discourse around the Third Reich was mostly framed in terms of a dichotomy of victims and perpetrators. The Holocaust was the dominant topic during history classes and the attention of the students was drawn on the crimes perpetrated in the concentration camps.

YORK 3: “It was mostly about the Holocaust, and particularly about the concentration and death camps, less about the military units at the front.”

All participants recalled that teachers used photos and/or documentary movies to help them visualize such dichotomy. The photographs (mostly found in history schoolbooks) focused almost exclusively on the Jewish victims, representing both the concentrations camps as physical places (e.g. the “Arbeit macht frei” sign in Auschwitz) and the atrocities perpetrated by there the Nazis (e.g. prisoners, dead bodies, death marches).

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3 “Es wär immer ein omnipräentes Thema alles in allem, nicht nur im Geschichtsunterricht.”
4 “Insbesondere ging es um den Holocaust, und dabei um Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager, weniger um Einsatzgruppen an der Front.”
In some cases, students emphasised how this opposition led to an oversimplification of the historical events and actors through a process that PRAGUE 1 described as “black-and-white thinking and categorisation: the criminal Nazis, the heroic members of the resistance, etc.” Other participants described different experiences in this sense, as their teachers carefully avoided slipping into easy categorisation by pointing out that the Jews were not the only victims of the Nazi crimes and that Nazi Germans were not the only perpetrators of atrocious crimes during the war.

PRAGUE 1: “The atrocity of the crimes was indeed specifically addressed and it was also pointed out that Jews were not the only victims of the Nazi regime.”

YORK 1: “At the same time, however, it was emphasised that other countries, especially the USSR, also committed tremendous crimes during the war.”

Although the students were explicitly asked to include their reactions and feelings, most participants preferred to focus on the description of the aspects addressed in class and on the didactic tool used by the teachers. Despite this reluctance to express their feelings, the students agreed on the fact that an emotional approach to the topic was sought during classes, mainly by means of showing photos and organising visits to the concentration camps. The few participants who explicitly revealed their personal emotional state explained that they felt shocked by the photographs of the concentration camps seen in history textbooks and/or worried by the eventuality that a similar situation may repeat itself.

Students proved to be quite critical towards the, according to them, inadequate approach shown by many teachers during history classes. Some educators seemed guilty to rush through the topic in a superficial way, as if the history of the Third Reich was a weight to take of their minds as soon as possible.

PRAGUE 1: “Feeling: the teacher does not want to handle the topic, or he does not exactly know how to approach it without any gaffe.”

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5 “Schwarz-weiß-Denken und Kategorisieren: der verbrecherische Nazi, der Heldenhafte Widerstännder, etc.”
6 “Die Grausamkeit der Verbrechen wurde allerdings klar benannt und darauf verwiesen, dass nicht nur Juden Opfer des NS-Regimes waren.”
7 “Gleichzeitig wurde jedoch auch hervorgehoben, dass andere Länder, vor allem die UdSSR ebenfalls enorme Kriegsverbrechen begangen haben.”
8 “Gefühl: Lehrer will Thema nicht behandeln oder weiss nicht wirklich, wie er es behandeln soll, ohne irgendwelche Fauxpas zu begehen.”
Rather than promoting a critical approach by engaging in discussions with their students, some educators found more convenient to make them watch documentary (or even fictional) movies. Regarding this issue, YORK 4 described his experience visiting Auschwitz and taking part to a meeting with a Polish Holocaust survivor. In this case, teachers were accused to have not sufficiently prepared the students for the meeting, and to have not developed any constructive reflection from their visit to the concentration camp.

Due to the increasing temporal distance from the Nazi time, memorials and museums have taken on a growing importance as sites where the memory of the Nazi crimes and of the victims is preserved and as didactic tools alongside history textbooks, photos and both fictional and non-fictional movies. All participants but YORK 1 and PRAGUE 1 (who, however, went to some exhibitions privately) stated that they visited at least one museum and/or concentration camp memorial together with their history (and sometimes also religion) teachers.

4.2.1.2 Communicative memory: approaching the Nazi past at home

A second social context in which collective memory is constructed and discussed is the family. The themes reoccurring in the inquiries concerning the family dialogue about the Nazi past are: absence of a structured dialogue, centrality of personal stories and individual anecdotes, victimism, justification and heroism. The last three themes reflect to a large extent the Tradierungstypen (models of transmission) identified by Harald Welzer.

As the data regarding this specific question were analysed, it emerged that family dialogue about the Nazi past show a lack of structured discussion. Some students admitted that the topic was never systematically approached in their families. The reasons behind this silence were different. In some cases, nobody who could remember life under the Nazi Regime was still alive. In some other cases, the grandparents decided not to bring up the topic or simply they were never asked to talk about it.

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10 Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, Karoline Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2002), 81.
YORK 1: “The topic of the Nazi time was barely mentioned in my family. Later I did ask my grandparents, but they were all born after the war (…).”

YORK 3: “Practically no discussion at all. My grandfather was a soldier during the Second World War, but we have almost never talked about it. This is not because he refused to talk about it, but rather because he was never asked to.”

Nevertheless, the majority of the students were able to recall few times in which they discussed the Nazi past at home. As it was predictable, the stories share by the Zeitzeugen centred on their individual experiences and they either focus on specific, meaningful anecdotes or give an extended account of their life situation during the Third Reich. The fate of Jewish victims was not brought up in the answers provided by the participants, and other groups of victims were also marginalized and mentioned only in relation to the own ancestors.

Talking about the Nazi past with the own grandmother or grandfather meant above all listening to their personal stories of sufferance. As in Harald Welzer’s analysis of intergenerational family dialogue, a major theme emerging from these stories is the one of victimism. German population (and in this case the own grandparents and grand-grandparents) was presented as the first victims of the Nazi regime. In the students’ answers, this theme was articulated in terms of pain and deprivation during the wartime or just right after the war. Students reported here the situations of extreme difficulty and poverty encountered by the own ancestors: the lack of food and materials, the fear of air attacks, the search for a shelter during the bombing etc. These stories were also implicitly filled with a mixture of what Harald Welzer defined as “Rechtfertigung” (justification) and “Distanzierung” (alienation). Living mostly in the countryside, the participants’ families experienced the difficult life conditions during the Second World War, but they had no clue as to what was happening in the cities, let alone in the concentrations camps.

YORK 1: “Moreover, they constantly repeated that they had nothing to do with the war (and so also with the National socialism), because they lived in the countryside and therefore they were barely affected.”

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11 “In meiner Familie wurde über das Thema NS kaum gesprochen. Zwar habe ich meine Großeltern danach gefragt, allerdings sind diese alle erst in der Nachkriegszeit geboren worden (…).”
12 “Praktisch gar keine Diskussion. Mein Großvater war Soldat im 2. WK, aber darüber haben wir wenig gesprochen. Das lag nicht daran, dass er sich geweigert hätte, darüber zu sprechen, sondern daran, dass er nicht gefragt wurde.”
13 Welzer, Moller, Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”, 83
14 “Außerdem sagten sie stets, dass sie mit dem Krieg (und damit inkludiert auch dem NS) nicht zu tun haben hätten, weil sie auf dem Land gelebt hätten und deshalb kaum betroffen gewesen seien.”
Students showed an overall objective approach towards their family’s stories during (or right after) the Nazi regime. A bigger personal emotional involvement emerged exclusively in words of YORK 2.\textsuperscript{15} He recalled the personal stories of his grandmother, the only “Kriegeskind” in his family who he had the chance to get to know and whom depicted as an everyday hero.

\textbf{YORK 2:} “She also told me about her hard times as young girl during the airstrikes in the Ruhr area. She protected her little, beloved brother, who was in a wheelchair, and she carried him to the bunker. Every time that there was an airstrike alarm, almost every day, 2 km uphill.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{4.2.1.3 Mediating between the two memories: images of victims and perpetrators}

After describing how the Nazi past was approached at school and at home, the participants were asked to elaborate on the images of victims and perpetrators that remained impressed in their minds the most. This inquiry aimed at understanding how the students developed the own perception of the Nazi past.

The word “image” (“Bild” in the final German version of the survey) was thus chosen to indicate a “mental representation or idea”\textsuperscript{17} (“Vorstellung, Eindruck”\textsuperscript{18} in German) that the students had developed about the topic. All participants but one understood instead the term “image” in its literal meaning of “visible impression obtained by a camera, telescope, microscope, or other device, or displayed on a computer or video screen” \textsuperscript{19} (“Fotografie; gedruckt wiedergegebene bildliche Darstellung”\textsuperscript{20} in German).

The question was originally formulated with the intention to explore the mental representations of the students (“images”) and the sources of such ideas (“media”). The only participants who to a certain extent was able to grasp the intended meaning of the inquiry was YORK 2, who presented two contrasting interpretations of victims and perpetrators encountered at school and at home. In school, he was taught that everyone who did not stood up against Nazi dictatorship was to be considered responsible for the...
crimes. However, the story of pain and sufferance of his grandparents got him convinced of the fact that the status of perpetrator should not be generalized to the entire German population and that the weakest individuals were actually the first victims on the Nazis.

For the analysis of the other participants’ accounts, the major themes emerged are: importance of visual media, striking prevalence of victims’ images, emotional uneasiness and need for critical reflection.

All participants mentioned photography as the visual media supporting and diffusing these images. They also agreed on the fact that, once again, these images developed the dichotomy of victims and perpetrators with a marked focus on the Jewish victims. Photos of concentration camps (especially of Auschwitz with its iconic entrance sign “Arbeit macht frei”), of the ghettos, of the starving Jewish prisoners and of the heaps of corpses saw on television or in schoolbooks were still very vivid in the participants’ minds. Only PRAGUE 1 cited some photographs portraying the perpetrators, focusing either on official situations during the Third Reich or mostly on the Entnazifizierung process right after the end of the war. By mentioning the figure of Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg, PRAGUE 1 also touched upon the topic of resistance, which appeared to be quite a marginal one as it was almost never cited by the participants.

Movies were also mentioned as an important source of images from the Nazi past. Even though it may sound quite paradoxical, fiction movies often made historical events look real to the students’ eyes and helped them understand what happened during the Third Reich.

Another major theme is the emotional uneasiness felt by the students in front of photographs and movies, while reading books and while visiting the physical places where the atrocious crimes were perpetrated. Participants articulated their feelings in terms of sadness for the victims’ fate, firm rejection of the Nazi ideology, dismay at the cruelty human beings are capable of, fear that something similar may happen again and even physical distress during the visit of a concentration camp. COPENHAGEN 1 is surely the participant who expressed his emotions in the most explicit way, however most of his feelings can also be grasped from the other students’ answers.

The students showed different reactions and personal stances towards these images and their striking focus on the victims. Nevertheless, even though with different modalities, students seemed to consider important the need for a critical reflection.
According to YORK 3, it is up to each individual to counterbalance the focus on the victims by showing sensibility and interest also for other aspects of the Nazi past. COPENHAGEN 1 considers the images of the concentration camps as powerful reminders of the constant danger that the Nazi ideology may take root in German society again, if not contrasted by a diffuse civic education. He stressed also how the private visit to Buchenwald triggered an intense reflection (“it kept me busy for days”\textsuperscript{21}), while YORK 4 pointed out that he only recently realised that such reflection was missing from his visit to Auschwitz because the teachers decided not to develop it with the students.

\section*{4.2.2 ERASMUS experience: encountering the Nazi past abroad}

The students’ accounts of their ERASMUS experiences in terms of confrontation with the Nazi past present some interesting scenarios, which can be articulated in the following themes: randomness of situations, centrality of the perpetrators discourse, importance of the confrontation with other individuals, discovery of new cultural and social environments.

Only two participants declared that they were by no means confronted with the Nazi past while abroad. One of them is UNKNOWN, who for this reason did not fill in the survey at all, and the other one is YORK 4, who completed only the first part of the survey and left the section about the ERASMUS experience blank. YORK 2 initially stated that he was not confronted with the topic, but despite these premises, he later describes an anecdote happened during a lecture in York.

The answers provided by the participants showed that the collective memory of the Nazi past is not an exclusively national matter, and that references to and discussions about the Third Reich, the Holocaust and the memory thereof can occur in a \textit{variety of different situations} abroad. In most cases, the topic was touched upon during the lectures and the seminars the students attended at their host universities. Some of these classes were already focusing on German history, such as the “Seminar ‘Nazi Propaganda im Film – Riefenstahl, Harlan, Goebbels’” mentioned by PRAGUE 1, while some others were actually dealing with non-German topics, such as the “Seminar zu Modern Britain” attended by YORK 2 or the “Dänische Kultur und Geschichte Vorlesung” mentioned by COPENHAGEN 1.

\textsuperscript{21}“(…) es hat mich noch tagelang beschäftigt.”
Besides these situations of academic learning, another instance cited by the participants involved the discovery of the host country’s cultural heritage. PRAGUE 1 was taking part to a city tour in Prague when he learnt that Jewish life was flourishing in Czech Republic before the country was occupied by the Nazis. YORK 1 was instead visiting a museum in Edinburgh and run across some Germans arms from the Second World War displayed alongside Scottish military equipment.

The remaining participants stated that the topic of the Nazi past was touched upon in more unexpected instances during casual conversations with other students. This introduces the second major theme in this regard, namely the importance of the confrontation with other individuals. COPENHAGEN 1 reported an anecdote told by his Danish flat-mate about the Finnish writer Tove Jansson, who allegedly created the imaginary world of the Muminis as a refuge from the violence of the war. COPENHAGEN 1 also happened to address the topic of the Nazi past with a German friend while commenting the development of the PEGIDA movement in Germany. YORK 3 discussed the importance that the Nazi past still plays in German society nowadays while having a walk with an English friend. Finally, PRAGUE 1 engaged in discussions with some fellow-students about the persecution of the Jews and the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis against the Eastern European population. As it will be pointed out later in this chapter, those students who actively talked about the Nazi past and their positions towards it with other individuals (may it be local students, international students or even other Germans) are also the ones who reflected on the significance of such experiences in the most intensive way.

The aspect of the Nazi past that was touched upon in these situations was the role of the perpetrators rather than the victims’ situation as it happened in the domestic discourse. In the experiences of YORK 2 and YORK 3, this theme was articulated in terms of the constant presence of the past in the present and how Germany shaped its political and social practices in the shadow of the Nazi past.

YORK 2: “I took a seminar about modern Britain in York, where I was like the expert from Germany. However, I had the opportunity to talk more about the industrialisation and the pre-war period rather than about the National Socialism. In this, at least so I seem to remember, the lecturer was impressed by the fact that German students approach critically also the history of their own country and do not only focus on the positive aspects, but can also rub in their own wounds.”

22 “Ich habe ein Seminar zu Modern Britain in York belegt und da war immer etwas wie die Expertenstimme aus Deutschland. Da habe ich aber mehr zur Industrialisierung und der
YORK 3: “Brief conversation with an English friend during a walk. I said, that today the Nazi past still plays a quite an important role (for example in politics) in Germany, and therefore some things would just be done different in Germany than they are done in England. For instance, an ‘Army Night’ was organised at the university in York and students had to dress up in a military outfit before going to the club. I meant, something like this could hardly be an official university event. My friend found it surprising. He believed that in England there is absolutely nothing wrong with an ‘Army Night’ and I agreed with him.”

The military aspect appeared also in YORK 1’s answer, and he emphasized the fact that in Germany is quite unusual for World War II arms to be displayed in a museum without photos of ghettos or concentrations camps.

In the experiences of COPENHAGEN 1, the role of the perpetrators was articulated in two different ways. The first one regarded the role of the older German generations, which, in the words of a friend of his, were almost all involved in the Nazi party and simply do not want to talk about it with their grandchildren. The second way is through a supposed photo of Hitler, which a Danish boy seemed to have hanging in his house.

COPENHAGEN 1: “The same friend met a Danish boy, whose profile picture gave the impression that a photo of Hitler was hanging in the background. We discussed at length whether she should see him again. We reached the conclusion that she had to address the issue with him and that she should absolutely not be friend with someone who has a photo of Hitler hanging in his flat.”

PRAGUE 1 is the only participant who was confronted with the Nazi past in relation to the victims of the Holocaust and of the Nazi expansion towards the neighbour countries. In his case, he got confronted mainly with the topic of antisemitism and the systematic destruction of Jewish life and culture in the occupied territories.

Vorkriegszeit betragen könne als zum NS. Wobei, so meine ich mich zu erinnern, mein Dozent davon angetan war, dass deutsche Studierende auch die Geschichte ihres eigenen Landes direkt kritisch betrachten und nicht nur die Sonnenseiten rausgreifen und auch mal in eigenen Wunden reiben.”

“Kurzes Gespräch bei einem Spaziergang mit deinem befreundeten englischen Kommilitonen. Ich habe gesagt, dass die NS-Vergangenheit in Deutschland heutzutage noch eine relativ große Rolle spielt (etwa politisch), und dass deshalb einiges in Deutschland anders ablaufen würde, als es in England abgelaufen ist. Zum Beispiel, gab es an unserer Universität in York eine „Army Night“, bei der sich die Studenten vor dem Besuch eines Clubs im Armee-Outfit verkleiden sollten. Ich meinte, dass so etwas in Deutschland eher unwahrscheinlich eine offizielle Uni-Veranstaltung sein könnte. Mein Kommilitone fand das erstaunlich, Er meinte, eine „Army Night“ in England sein völlig in Ordnung, und ich habe ihm zugestimmt.”

“Eben diese Freundin hat einen Dänen kennengelernt, der ein Profilbild hatte, auf dem es so aussah, als würde ein Hitlerfoto im Hintergrund hängen. Wir haben ausführlich darüber diskutiert, ob sie sich noch mit ihm treffen soll. Wir sind zu dem Schluss gekommen, dass sie ihn darauf ansprechen muss und auf keinen Fall mit jemandem befreundet sein kann, der ein Hitlerfoto in der Wohnung hängen hat.”
The feeling of surprise in front of situations that would have presented themselves differently in Germany implied in the answers of YORK 1 and YORK 3 is deeply connected with the last theme, namely the discovery of new cultural and social environments. As expected, the students took their ERASMUS stay as an opportunity to explore the new environment by taking part to diverse social activities. Thanks to these activities, they discovered new realities and compared them – even unconsciously - to the situations and meaning-making process from home. These dynamics can be attributed to situations of culture shock and will be analysed more in depth in the interpretative section of this chapter. Depending on the students’ response to these situations, a more or less deep reflection on the own perception of the Nazi past e triggered.

4.2.2.1 Reaction and personal reflection

In the last part of the survey, students were asked to elaborate on their feelings and reactions to such situations. From the analysis of their answers, two main themes emerged, namely the lack of a strong impact on their own personal stance towards the Nazi past and the generally positive character of their attitude towards the new environment.

Participants did not give “too much importance”25 – to use YORK 1’s words – to the encounter of situations dealing with the Nazi past during their ERASMUS stays. None of the students stated that he had somehow negotiated or radically reinterpreted his own stance towards the Nazi past following such experiences. While it is undeniable that the ERASMUS stay had no big impact on the students’ perception of the Nazi past, it is also true that all students elaborated a reflection, however brief and superficial, on what had just happened to them. Only two participants described a slightly deeper reflection. They were however broad and general reflections, focusing more on the social-political situation of Germany rather than on the students’ persona opinions on the topic.

YORK 2: “In the end, it is actually simply true that the National Socialism is traditionally approached in a critical way. In British history there are more

25 “keine allzu tiefgehende Bedeutung”.

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controversial historical nodes, for example the Thatcher-era or also the decision to join the EU."\textsuperscript{26}

YORK 3: “I reflected a little on whether or not Germany has the duty the behave differently from the other countries (especially on the politcial level) because of its Nazi past. This was not an extremely intense and long reflection, and it also had no deep impact, but all in all I think that the Nazi past should not drive the current German (foreign) politic. Surely enough, this does not mean that the much-quoted ‘final stroke’ should be drawn.”\textsuperscript{27}

All participants showed a first positive reaction to the new articulations of the Nazi past (or, at the very least, no one reported a resentful or negative response). This theme was articulated in terms of surprise (“I was a bit puzzled”\textsuperscript{28} explained YORK), and interest (“this information/conversations were also very interesting for me”\textsuperscript{29} claimed COPENHAGEN 1). Being confronted with new approaches to the Nazi past was also described as a unique opportunity to enrich the own point of view with new perspectives and to become more sensitive towards a variety of social issues never considered before.

PRAGUE 1 was the only student who showed a negative reaction, not in the sense that he refused and/or felt disgusted by the interpretations of the Nazi past encountered abroad, but rather in terms of guilt and resignation.

PRAGUE 1: “Once again, I had to recognise that, as German, one has always and everywhere to reckon with the fact that he will eventually be confronted with the crimes of the National Socialism.”\textsuperscript{30}

Participants were explicitly asked to assess the impact of the ERASMUS stay on their own perception of the Nazi past by indicating to what extend they agreed with the following statement: “my ERASMUS experience had an impact on my own perception

\textsuperscript{26} “Was aber auch recht einfach ist, da das NS-System ja auch bei uns im Common Sense als kritische gesehen wird. In der Britischen Geschichte gibt es eben mehr historische Streitpunkte z.B. die Thatcher-Ära oder auch den Eintritt in die EU.”

\textsuperscript{27} YORK 3: “Ich habe ein wenig darüber nachgedacht, inwiefern Deutschland heutzutage in der Verantwortung ist (oder nicht ist), sich (besonders in politischer Insicht) anders zu verhalten als andere Staaten, weil es den NS gab. Das war kein wahnsinnig intensives und langes Nachdenken und es hatte auch keine tiefen Auswirkung, aber ich finde insgesamt, die NS-Vergangenheit sollte Deutschlands heutige (Außen-)Politik nicht lenken. Das freilich heißt nicht, dass der vielzitierte „Schlussstrich“ gezogen werden sollte.”

\textsuperscript{28} “[Ich war] etwas verwundert”.

\textsuperscript{29} “Diese Informationen/Gespräche waren für mich jeweils sehr interessant.”

\textsuperscript{30} “Ich habe wieder mal erkannt, dass man als Deutscher überall und jeder Zeit damit rech[n]en muss, mit den Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus konfrontiert zu werden”
of the Nazi past”. Four students did not agree at all with this statement, two moderately agreed and finally only one agreed to certain extend.

4.2.2.2 Presence of prejudices and stereotypes
None of the participants experienced stereotypes against the German that were referring to the Nazi past while abroad for the ERASMUS semester. YORK 2 stated that he encountered positive stereotypes of the German during a previous experience abroad, when his direct way to talk to people and tidiness were described as “very German”. COPENHAGEN 1 was once called “Viking” by a drunken American in a bar because of his German nationality. Finally, PRAGUE 1 did not experience any explicit stereotypes, but he had the feeling that locals hold prejudices against him, but mostly because he was not able to speak Czech language.

4.3 Interpretative Analysis
The thematic results reported above provide a descriptive account of the students’ experiences in their own words. This section provides an analysis of the themes reported by the participants by giving a cross-cutting reading of the themes described in the previous section in the light of the theory introduced in Chapter 1 and in Chapter 2.

4.3.1 Memory contests: tension or complementarity?
The first step necessary to analyse how German students adapt, negotiate and re-interpret German collective memory of the Nazi past in the light of their ERASMUS experience is to have a clear picture of the student’s perception of collective memory prior to the ERASMUS stay.

In the previous section, the descriptive analysis of the themes has provided an overview of how German collective memory of the Nazi past was constructed in class and at home, which aspects were stressed, the approach taken, the students’ feelings and stances towards it, the images that remained impressed into their minds. The interpretations of the past constructed in each social contexts are surely different and at time even contrasting. The first impression is that, in the experiences of the participants, there is a tension between communicative and cultural memory.

At school, the topic of the Third Reich and of the Holocaust was approached in similar ways in the experiences of all participants and, to a large extent, it was developed in the modality described in Chapter 1. History classes were mostly focused
on the level of the transfer of historical knowledge, but an emotional approach was also sought especially through the same reoccurring photos taken in ghettos and concentration camps. The history of the Third Reich was broken down into a series of topical events, which the teachers present to the students in a systematic way. Nevertheless, the focus always tended to remain on the victims of the Nazi crimes (ghettos, deportation, concentration camps, mass-murders), while other aspects related to the Third Reich seemed to remain in quite a marginal position. In this context, participants pointed out the lack of sufficient preparation of the teacher in approaching such a potentially sensitive.

The education to “to civil, humane and tolerant behaviour,”\textsuperscript{31} to autonomy and to critical thinking promoted by Adorno seemed thus not to be one of the first priorities of history classes, at least not in the participants’ experiences. This kind of education was in many cases offered at home, when they learnt to refuse simplistic categorizations and about the importance of autonomous thinking in preventing an eventual revival of the Nazi ideology in modern German society.

In the participants’ families, a systematic dialogue about the Nazi past did not always take place, and this surely makes it harder to assess the relation between the two memories. Some students did not get the chance to talk about life during the Third Reich with their grandparents because the latter were born at the end of or right after the war. Silence thus seems not to be an “institutionalised practice”\textsuperscript{32} as in the families interviewed by Gabriele Rosenthal, where perpetrators preferred to remain silent about the Nazi crimes to protect themselves from accusation and loss of affection from the other family members,\textsuperscript{33} but rather a consequence of the increasing temporal distance from the Nazi past and the fact that the Zeitzeugen are dying off. In this sense, the meetings with Holocaust survivors and more in general with Zeitzeugen become fundamental and delicate learning moments. For younger generations, whose parents and grandparents had not directly experienced the war and whose grand-grandparents died before they was born, this may be the only opportunity to listen to first-hand memories about life and sufferance during the Third Reich. Several intergenerational programmes have been developed in order to foster these situations of intergenerational


\textsuperscript{32} Gabriele Rosenthal, Der Holocaust im Leben von drei Generationen: Familien von Überlebenden der Shoah und von Nazi-Tätern (Gießen:Psychosozial-Verlag, 1999), 19

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
dialogue between the old Zeitzeugen and the younger generation, with benefits for both parts. However, the meeting should neither start nor end with the Zeitzeugen sharing their stories, but students should both be prepared for the meeting and have the chance to reflect on the experience afterwards. This practice can make the meeting much more meaningful.\(^\text{34}\)

When the dialogue took place, it focused on the personal stories and anecdotes of the own family members. The Jews or other groups of victims are barely mentioned and the attribute of “victim” was given to the own grandparents, who had to face poverty and sufferance during the Third Reich. At this point, it is important to underline the fact that the theme of victimism was framed by the participants more in terms of “victims of the war” rather than “victims of the Nazis” (with the exception of YORK 2 case, which will be explained later on). The anecdotes about the lack of food and materials and about seeking a refuge during the air strikes never make a clear reference to the Nazis, but they rather refer to material difficulties attributable to a generic situation of war. Through the words of the grandchildren, it emerged the alienation and justification process carried out by some grandparents. They adduced the fact that they were living in the country side to take distance from the Nazism and its crimes, which were considered as something belonging to the city and thus only touching the people living in urban environments.

Compared to the younger Germans taking part in Harald Welzer’s research project, the participants showed a diffuse lack of emotional involvement towards the personal stories of their ancestors. Harald Welzer saw in the cumulative heroization process a clear sign of how strongly emotional views of individual roles influences the individual perception of history.\(^\text{35}\) When unsure about the role of the own grandparents in the Third Reich, participants were really cautious not to make any claims of innocence or guilt.

YORK 3: My grandfather was a soldier during the Second World War, but we have almost never talked about it. This is not because he refused to talk about it, but rather because he was never asked to.”\(^\text{36}\)

\(^{34}\) Natan P. F. Kellermann, *Holocaust Trauma: Psychological Effects and Treatment* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009), 102-103.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., 80.
\(^{36}\) “Mein Großvater war Soldat im 2. WK, aber darüber haben wir wenig gesprochen. Das lag nicht daran, dass er sich geweigert hätte, darüber zu sprechen, sondern daran, dass er nicht gefragt wurde. Ich habe keinerlei Anhaltspunkte dafür, dass er an Verbrechen beteiligt war.”
The only clear exception (as some participants did not express their stances in this regard) is YORK 2’s experience. At home he was exposed to conversations about the Nazi crimes since he was a child, as the topic was thoroughly discussed by his parents with the older brother. As already mentioned in the descriptive analysis, YORK 2 reported the personal story of his grandmother, who as little girl herself had to take care of her little brother sitting in a wheelchair and carry him to a safe place every time the air strikes alarms went off. Wartime experiences left deep psychological scars in YORK 2 grandmother, damaging her physical and mental integrity and forcing her to take pills against panic attacks for the rest of her life. Her story and her psycho-physical conditions provoked an intense emotional reaction in YORK 2, who refused to consider her as a follower of the Nazi ideology and as perpetrator only because she took at heart and put the fate of her family first.

YORK 2: “At school my grandparents were considered perpetrators, because they did not rebel against the system. Everyone who did not stand against the National Socialism like Bonhoeffer was a perpetrator. For a long time, I was also convinced that it was like this. But then, considering my family’s position, I thought that, if a 15 years old girl, who obeys for fear of the system to protect her disabled little brother. Is she really a perpetrator. And if a 17 years old boy in a remote, poor fishing village in Pomerania does not stand out like Bonhoeffer, but he rather takes care of his mother and of his little sister, is he really a perpetrator in a system, which gassed Jews as well as a SS-official. Personally, I can answer this with a ‘no’. 37

YORK 2’s account is example of how memory contests can develop at the individual level. The topic of the Nazi past was discussed in a systematic way both at home and at school, providing YORK’2 with the opportunity to get into contact with different ways in which the past can be framed and represented. In this case, the tension between the two memories is marked and clear. The personal story of a family member offered an alternative version of the past, which challenged the official representations given in school, triggering a memory contest which shaped YORK 2 perception of the Nazi past. YORK 2 himself stated that, for a long time, he adopted the version elaborated at school as his own stance. Once faced with the own grandmother’s story of

sufferance and with the deep scars left by that experience, he could however not accept any longer the idea that his grandmother and her family could go down in history as perpetrators of those very crimes they were the first victim of. Under the influence of YORK’2 emotional attachment to the grandmother, the memory contest thus resolved with a de-legitimisation of the version offered at school in favour of the interpretation presented at home.

YORK 2’s personal memory contest is however an isolate case among the participants. In the other cases, the apparent conflict between communicative and cultural memory emerging from the interpretation of the students answers was not perceived as such by the students themselves. When it came to assess the relation between communicative and cultural memory, students were quite wary about using the term “tension”. Several participants stated that communicative memory and cultural memory cover to a large extent the same topics, even though they approach them on different level and from different points of view. The thematic analysis seemed to contradict this statement highlighting the potential points of tension in the two different interpretations of the past. However, this tension remains latent, as the participant did not perceived such differences as symptomatic of a conflict, but rather of the fact that, focusing on different levels, the two memories complement each other to provide them with a clearer and more encompassing picture of the Nazi past.

Having established that generally the relation between communicative and cultural memory is of complementarity rather than of tension, how do students mediate between the two memories? Which elements do they internalize, which interpretations do they take as their personal stances? Except YORK 2, no one showed a marked preference for the either of the two interpretations provided at home and at school.

As already pointed out in the descriptive analysis, all participants but YORK 2 understood the inquiry “Which images of victims and perpetrators have remained impress in your mind the most?” in terms of physical images (photos, documentaries, movies etc.) rather than of mental representations, as the question was originally intended.

A possible explanation for this misunderstanding lies in the fact that, for many participants, family dialogue about the Nazi past was not carried out in the same systematic way as in class, and it surely was not characterised by any strong emotional involvement. In this way, communicative memory may have been overshadowed by the institutionalized representations focused on Jewish victims and their sufferance to
which the students were exposed in class thanks to schoolbooks and documentary/fictional movies. Such representations thus became the way in which students made sense of the Nazi past. In this sense it becomes understandable why students immediately thought about photographs and movies when they read the question in the survey.

Harald Welzer already stressed the impact of visual media – especially fictional movies - on the perception of certain historical events. These representations seem to offer realistic and authentic (but in reality highly artificial) perspectives on historical events, so that people may start believing that something seen in a movie is actually what historically happened.

Images are essential vehicles of collective memory, as they “help stabilize and anchor collective memory’s transient and fluctuating nature in art cinema, television and photography”. Visual memory’s materiality makes it more powerful than other kind of memory, so that it is more likely for physical images such as photographs and videos/movies to remain impressed in one’s mind.

The use of terms such as “anchor” and “stabilize” in reference to the relation between images and collective memory reminds of the stable and institutionalized nature of cultural memory conceptualized by Jan Assmann. Images use visual devices (e.g. photographs) to convey a previously attached meaning to the public. Their functioning and effectivity depends to the message (either written or oral) they are linked to. Images are conventional and simple. Conventional, because image has to be equally meaningful to each individual of a social group, and simple, because it makes it easier to transmit them in a meaningful way. Photographs power, and the reason why they remain so easily impressed in one’s mind, relies in the combination of their high truth value and a powerful symbolic force.

YORK 1: “While still in school, these images sacred me a lot, but at the same time they also made the Nazi crimes look more real to my eyes.”

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38 Welzer, Moller, Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”, 105.
39 Ibid., 106.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 5.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 7.
46 “Diese Bilder haben mich vor allem während meiner Schulzeit sehr erschreckt, die Verbrechen der Nationalsozialisten aber auch realer wirken lassen.”
A similar discourse is also valid for the movies. As it also emerged from Harald Welzer’s study,47 “Schindler’s List” by Steven Spielberg (USA, 1993) is the title that occurred more times in the participants’ answers. Since its release, this movie has been used as a starting point to develop a reflection on the limits and problems associated with the representation of the Holocaust. The movie has a fictional, dramatic, historical character48 and as such has been recognized not only able to perpetuate the memory of historical events, but also to shape the memory of them.49 As also the students’ answers hint, “Schindler’s List” was able to penetrate historical consciousness and shaped the perception of the Holocaust of millions of individuals all around the world, thanks to its ability to “challenge the limits by making the unimaginable imaginable, the unrepresentable presentable”.50

The photographs taken in the ghettos and in the concentration camps (where also most of the fictional movies are set) dragged the students’ attention on the Jewish victims’ sufferance and to the horrendous nature of the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis. Students did not develop further on the meaning they attached to these images, nor did they explicitly state their personal stances towards the Nazi past. However, from their answers it emerged a general invitation for a critical approach to the Nazi past. Observing a photograph portraying starving Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz or watching Schindler’s List might make the participants feel sad, angry, scared, disgusted, but not guilty. None of them suggested the fact that younger German generations might have any kind of responsibility in the crimes perpetrated during the Third Reich.51 The only responsibility students felt to have was towards the present, and it involved a firm rejection of the Nazi ideology, a proper civil education and more differentiated approach to the Nazi past which does not almost exclusively focus on the victims’.52

YORK 1: “(the movies) certainly led me to reject the National Socialism even more firmly.”

47 Welzer, Moller, Tschuggnall, “Opa war kein Nazi”, 132.
50 Ibid., 2.
51 The theme of guilt is however briefly mentioned by PRAGUE 1 while describing his reaction to the complete annihilation of Jewish life and culture in Eastern Europe. In this case the feeling of guilt is temporary and linked to a very specific situation and thus not to be considered as a part of the personal stance of the student towards the Nazi past.
52 “(die Filme) haben sicherlich zu einer noch stärkeren Ablehnung des NS meinerseits geführt (…)”
YORK 3: “These images strongly shift the attention onto the concentration and death camps (...) in return, one should sensitise himself and contrast this tendency.”

COPENHAGEN 1: “Preoccupation and fear caused by the fact that people are able to commit such atrocities and by the possibility, which I do consider not so remote, that something like this may happen again, if they are not properly educated, especially regarding their social competences (responsibility, compassion, civil courage).”

4.3.2 The limited impact of culture shock and intercultural socialisation

As explained in Chapter 2, both identity and collective memory are not only continuously intersecting and overlapping, but they are not fluid concepts constantly subject to negotiations and changes from the individual. Collective memory is constructed within social groups and it constitutes the backbone of an individual’s sense of belonging to such group by sharing the same meanings with the other group members.

Students do not start their study experiences abroad as tabulae rasae, but they arrive in the host country fully equipped with a baggage of knowledge, beliefs and values internalized at home. German students’ baggage contains also their personal interpretations of collective memory of the Nazi past constructed in the ways described in the previous section, through socialization at home and at school. Mobility, and with it intercultural contact, offers them the unique opportunity to confront themselves with different articulations of meanings in respect to what they were used in Germany.

The students’ answers showed that the Nazi past can be brought up in a variety of different situations, some of which are directly referable to episodes of culture shock. It is important of point out that not every new situation is a source of culture shock. According to Kalervo Oberg, culture shock manifests some typical “symptoms” such as the feeling of being rejected by the new culture and the confusion in values and feelings. YORK 1 and YORK 3 are the two participants that more than the others

53 “Diese Bilder lenken den Fokus stark auf die Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager (...) dafür muss man sich sensibilisieren und dem entgegenwirken.”
54 “Sorge und Angst, das Menschen zu so etwas im Stande sind und ich halte es für möglich, dass Menschen so etwas immer noch oder wieder tun, wenn sie nicht ausreichend und vielseitig gebildet werden, vor allem was ihre sozialen Kompetenzen angeht (Verantwortungsbewusstsein, Mitgefühl, Zivilcourage).”
55 Karina Oborune, “Becoming more European or Global After Student Mobility? The Impact of Student Mobility on European and Global Identity within and outside of Europe mobility (A Case-study of Switzerland” (paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, 26-29 August 2015, Université de Montréal); 6, accessed May 5, 2016, https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/471e5393-8f8b-47cb-9ca7-9bf7b5721f9.pdf.
described some episodes in which elements of the new environment made them feel a mild confusion. For YORK 1, this was articulated in terms of absence of photos portraying the victims in a museum display showing German arms of the Second World War. In the experience of YORK 3, the British student tradition of organising military-theme parties was also source of confusion. In this sense, the culture shock was related to a temporary loss of a single system of meaning caused by the sudden encounter with a new, unknown system. The confusion and the temporary loss of meaning were provoked by the transitory collapse of the students’ way of thinking and making sense of the world around them and the foreign environment itself. The students’ cognitive breakdown was in both cases very temporary and it quickly resolved with the students acknowledging the relative difference between the two realities in a non-judgemental way.

As already reported in Chapter 2, Elizabeth Murphy – Lejeune considered the word “shock” to be loaded with a negative connotation, and therefore not appropriate to describe the experiences of ERASMUS students. She suggested replacing it with more positive terms such as “surprise” or “discovery”, as the culture shock in ERASMUS student is mainly a source of curiosity, which “inspires, brings about revelations, new perspectives on a future which could have been limited”. The terms of “curiosity” and “discovery” were also the ones used by the participants to frame their encounters with the new system of the host environment.

Despite the fact that five out of seven participants stated to have been confronted with the Nazi past abroad at least once, these experiences had little if no impact at all on the way mediate between communicative and cultural memory.

The three participants (YORK 3, COPENHAGEN 1 and PRAGUE 1) who to certain extent agreed with the statement “My ERASMUS experience had an impact on my perception of the Nazi past” share some common elements. First of all, they spent more time with other international students and/or locals rather than with Germans. Secondly, they were confronted with the memory of the Nazi past in context of active intercultural socialization (meaning that they there were other people involved, they were not just visiting a museum or reading a book).

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56 Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune, Student Mobility and Narrative in Europe: The New Strangers (New York: Routledge, 2002), 129.
57 Ibid., 132.
58 Ibid., 132-133.
Students seemed to be aware of the fundamental role that intercultural socialization may play in this context. YORK 2 mentioned himself the fact that he lived in a dorm with mostly Germans as the reason why he did not any meaningful experience of confrontation with the Nazi past abroad.

A first distinction can be made between those students who prefer to hang out with fellow-countrymen and those who favor a more intercultural network of friends. At this point it also fundamental to point out that sometimes this may not depend on the students’ will as, due to the massive presence of fellow-countrymen at a partner university, they might just find themselves surrounded by same-nationality individual.

Some other times, however, staying with fellow-countrymen might be a mechanism of defense to overcome the culture shock of the new environment. If a student decides to hang out prevalently with other fellow-countrymen of his, he may – more or less consciously – try to find the support of someone who shares a similar set of values to fight the uneasiness caused by having to deal with an unknown reality. This is clearly a defensive behavior, which already indicate that the student is trying not to expose himself to the foreign environment, let alone to embrace the different values/beliefs/traditions and mediate between the old and new reality.

The stress on the importance of an intercultural environment does not exclude the possibility that also socialization with other Germans abroad may offer food for thoughts. The ERASMUS stay has proven to be also a stimulating environment to engage in discussions with the fellow-countrymen. Away from any eventual judgment of family and friends, students may show more willingness to open themselves and discuss their opinions.

COPENHAGEN 1: “A German friend and I were discussing the establishment of the PEGIDA movement in Germany and immediately ended up talking about the Nazi past. She said that she was convinced of the fact that most of our grandparents did have a Nazi past, but they did not want/ do not want to talk about it. This friend had also a very critical position towards the Danish royal family and the diffuse nationalism in Denmark.”


60 “Eine deutsche Freundin und ich haben uns über die Entstehung der PEGIDA in Deutschland unterhalten und kamen somit auf die NS-Zeit. Sie hat geäußert, dass sie fest überzeugt sei, die meisten unserer Großeltern hätten eine Nazivergangenheit, über die sie bloß nicht reden wollen/wollten. Diese Freundin war auch sehr kritisch gegenüber dem dänischen Königshaus und dem durchaus verbreiteten dänischen Nationalismus eingestellt.”
Students demonstrated to have encountered new articulations of the Nazi past also abroad and to have discussed them with their peers. How comes that these experiences were not regarded as meaningful and had no considerable impact on the students’ stances towards the Nazi past? The social identity theory elaborated by Henri Tajfel not only explains the formation and role of prejudices in intercultural contexts (which seem to be almost completely absent from the participants experience), but it can also be used to advance some possible explanations about the lack of impact of these instances. Social groups do not only provide their members with a set of values and shared meanings, but they also are important sources of pride and self-esteem, as they give individuals a sense of social identity, that is, a sense to belonging to the social world. What has been internalized at home, cultural and collective memory of the Nazi past is also source of sense of belonging to social groups in Germany. In this context, German collective memory is an essential element to strengthen the group identity. Abroad, this specific social function of the memory of the Nazi past is lacking. Students are indeed mobile social actors in transnational social fields, where home and host environments intersects, but what was internalized over the years at home is not likely to change after one semester abroad. The emotional attachment plays a fundamental role, and a superficial contact with other systems of beliefs abroad is not enough to have an impact, to undermine what was internalized at home.

The limited duration of the stay abroad may also be another reason of the lack of impact. An ERASMUS semester lasts from the three to the six months, and during that time students may perceive the new situations as “exotic” and fascinating. According to Oberg, the first positive approach to the new environment - called “honeymoon” - may last between few days up to six months. Some scholars had already warned about the superficiality of the contacts both with the new environment and with locals and other foreign students during the ERASMUS stay. Studying abroad for a full year has proven

to have a stronger and more enduring impact. While researching the impact of internships and study sojourns abroad on the students’ career development, Mary Dwyer found out that students who spent a whole year away from home were more likely to have changed their political and social stances due to their experience abroad. It is not by chance then that COPENHAGEN 1, the only student who spent one year abroad, was also the only with several relevant experiences and recognized that the ERASMUS experience had a sort of impact on his perception of the Nazi past.

Stereotypes of the German referring to the Nazi past (such as “you Nazi!”, “all German are Nazis” etc.) were proven not to belong to the participants’ experience abroad. However, PRAGUE 1 had often the feeling that local Czech people were holding some prejudices towards the Germans, even though he was never explicitly addressed in this sense. Here, it should be noted that PRAGUE 1 spend his ERASMUS semester in Czech Republic, where the local population may show a hostile attitude towards German for historical reasons. As a study by Karen Phalet and Edwin Poppe as shown, “perceptions of past antagonism or exploitation should be included as criteria in the assessment of inter-nation relations”. The image of Germans as “sinful winners” widespread in the six Eastern European countries examined during the study (among which also Czech Republic) may thus constitute a stereotype locals attribute to the Germans living in their country.

There is no evidence of a real process of negotiation, adaption and re-interpretation of German collective memory. As there was no initial, pre-ERASMUS tension between communicative and cultural memory (that is, no memory contest of any kind at the level of the individual), the ERASMUS stay and the experiences connected to them did not impact the relation between the two memories. As in the other inquiries, German students were quite reluctant to express their personal feelings and emotions. Since there are no clear evidence supporting the opposite, it is to believe that how the students made sense of the issue through socialization at home and at school remains unchanged.

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65 Ibid.
4.3 Conceptualisation of the “fourth generation”

The literary sources used in this thesis to provide the theoretical framework to the analysis of the construction of collective memory of the Nazi past were mainly relying on studies conducted among the so-called “third generation” (and sometimes even concerning the “second generation”), namely the children and grandchildren of Zeitzeugen. Growing up, these generations had the opportunity to confront themselves with the own ancestors on the topic of the Nazi past. As the answers provided by the participants have also highlighted, today many young Germans do not have the access to first-hand memories of the Third Reich. This reflection on the present-day relation between German society and its Nazi past was elaborated by Aleida Assmann, who stated that we are currently living a Generationswechsel (generational change). While those who directly experienced the Holocaust and the time of Nazi rule are aging and dying off, a new generation of young Germans who has known the Holocaust and the Nazi crimes only as history is growing. This generation is often addressed as “Urenkel Generation” (“great-grandchild generation”) or “vierte Generation” (“fourth generation”), where the counting refers to the generations within a family rather than to a socio-historical concept of generations.

Those who belong to the fourth generation usually grew up in a family environment with little if none direct contact with individuals who directly experienced life under the Nazi rule. Their grandparents were in fact too young to have any active role during the Second World War and their grand-grandparents often had died before their birth. Members of the fourth generation thus live in a very delicate position “between first hand and mediated memories” and usually do not come into contact with communicative memory through the dialogue with the bearers of those memories but rather through its “culturalisation” and historization.

69 Ibid.
71 Anne Fuchs, Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.
72 “Trauerimperativ: Jugendliche und ihr Umgang mit dem Holocaust (-Denkmal)“.
Since this generational shift is still an ongoing process (young individuals with relatively old parents and/or particularly long-lived relatives may have had direct contact with Zeitzeugen), this phenomenon is still too fresh to have been extensively explored in scientific literature. Most researches in this field – among which also the ones cited in this thesis - focus in fact on the third generation, also known as “Enkelgeneration” (“grand-children generation”). Nevertheless, the phenomenon has not passed unnoticed and several newspapers have published articles about it. Because of the blurred boundaries between biological generations, young Germans nowadays can show some features typical of the third generation in some aspects and, at the same time, a different approach in other matters.

On November 4, 2010, ZEITmagazin published an article entitled “Was geht mich das noch an?” which, among the others, reports the results of a study conducted by a group of researcher in Munich who explored the younger German generation’s personal stances towards the Nazi past. Their research project targeted young German students aged 14-19, a younger age group compared to the survey participants. This latter group showed a more mature approach to the topic, possibly because of the influence of their current academic studies in recalling their high school experiences.

The findings of the study show that the majority of young Germans nowadays are still interested in the Nazi time and consider meaningful to remember and commemorate it. 59% of the interviewees also stated to personally feel guilt for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis, while in the surveys there was almost no trace of the theme of guilt.

The article proceeds analyzing how the history of the Third Reich and the remembrance of the Holocaust are developed at school. In this context, the experiences reported in the article are very similar to the ones described in the surveys. A constant of the fourth generation seems to be the diffuse dissatisfaction for the teachers’ methods and personal insecurity in dealing with the Nazi past in front of the students. Even though the article does not mention any supposed tension between what is learnt at school and what is discussed at home, it highlights how the victim discourse is almost completely absent from family dialogue about the Nazi past. Sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War, life during the Third Reich still remained a topic of

73 Staas, “Was geht mich das noch an?”, 1.
74 Ibid., 2.
75 Ibid., 4.
discussion in German families. What has changed is the emotional involvement of the younger generations, which has drastically diminished due to the increasing temporal distance from that point in history. Should Harald Welzer write a book about the fourth generation, probably it would not be entitled “Opa was no Nazi”, but rather “Uropa may have been a Nazi”, as younger German generations tend to ponder the role of the own ancestors in the Nazi regime more objectively and do not have the emotional impetus to undertake any process of cumulative heroisation. This attitude was shown for instance by YORK 3, who preferred not to give anything away about a possible role of his grandfather as a soldier during the Second World War in absence of concrete hints.

One striking difference in the stances of the teenagers described in the article and the survey participants concerns the possibility of a new rise of the Nazi ideology. While only 29% of the interviewees expressed a concern in this sense, the survey participants showed a less optimistic attitude, possibly due to their higher intellectual engagement which made them reflect more intensively upon the current socio-political situation in Germany and grasp the possible links with the past (see for example the PEGIDA movements also mentioned by COPENHAGEN 1 in one of his answers).

The same day, ZEITmagazine published another article reporting some personal stories of young Germans and their experience with the memory of the Nazi past. Besides confirming the trends highlighted by the previous article, one of the interviews introduces another theme, which has already emerged in the surveys, namely the need for a critical approach to the issue. The fourth generation´s grandparents were too young to have any responsibility during the war, but now it is their responsibility as young Germans to prevent something similar to happen by practicing a responsible democratic participation (as it was also suggested by COPENHAGEN 1). Moreover, one of the interviewee also stated that it is her generation duty to fight partial and distorted representations of the Third Reich and of the Holocaust. This assumes an even bigger importance while travelling abroad, where everyone seems to know everything about Hitler´s figures, but not much about the ghetto in Warsaw or some even lesser known concentration camps such as Treblinka.

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76 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 7.
79 Ibid., 10.
This last passage already shows how this generation takes the transnational dimension into account, as they know that they will not spend their all life in Germany.

The transnational experience of a young German in Poland is the topic of an article uploaded by the online magazine Bento on April, 6. In this case, the topic is precisely an ERASMUS stay in Warsaw. In his article, Philip Raillon explored the anti-Germans feelings that a large part of Polish population still seems to be holding after more than half a century from the Second World War. He stated that he also was victim of prejudices himself, however the focus on the article is more on the Polish side and the social dynamics behind their attitude rather than on the impact such experience had on him as German.

A similar experience, but with different outcome can finally be found as leitmotiv of the German movie *Am Ende kommen Touristen* directed by Robert Thalheim. The movie tells the story of Sven, a young German man who moves from Berlin to Auschwitz in order to complete his period of alternative civilian service (*Zivildienst als Ersatzdienst*). He is assigned to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial with the duty of helping out in the International Youth Meeting Centre nearby and to take care of Stanisław Krzeminski, a Polish Holocaust survivor who lives and works in the Memorial’s museum. Sven shares a flat with Ania, a Polish girl who works as a tourist guide at the Memorial. Locals (Krzeminski and Krzysztof, Ania’s brother above all) often treat him suspiciously and taunt him for being German. For his part, Sven encounters some difficulties in familiarising with Auschwitz surroundings, as he feels confused by the fact that young Poles can actually live a normal life in the same place where one of the worst crimes against humanity of all times was perpetrated. “*Am Ende kommen Touristen*” can be considered a sort of “*Bildungsfilm*”, as it shows Sven’s individual, personal maturation process. This fiction movie clearly presents an extreme situation in terms of confrontations with the Nazi past abroad, namely the experience of a young German doing his civilian service in Auschwitz. His experience thus differs from the one of the participants in the sense that he was constantly and systematically confronted with the memory of the Nazi past for a period not shorter that one year. Just as the students who took part to the survey, however, Sven encounters new articulations

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81 In literature, the term *Bildungsroman* indicates a literary work focused on the psychological and moral development of the protagonist.
of the memory of the Nazi past, which initially cause a feeling of surprise and confusion. In his case, the situation of culture shock can be reduced to the clash between his own understanding of Auschwitz as place full of negative connotations and symbol of the Holocaust itself and the dynamic youth culture of the Polish town. Due to the longer time spent in the foreign environment and also to his deeper integration into its social dynamics, Sven elaborates the culture shock past its first stage. He firstly rejects the idea of Auschwitz as a normal place and regard the young Poles´ behaviour as disrespectful, but later on he accepts the diversity and starts integrating into the new environment by going out and having fun with his flatmate Ania and her friends.

Sven´s experience in Poland is also marked by the steady presence of prejudices against the Germans. Several times during the movie, the young German was the target of scorn and bad jokes. For instance, he was made fun of by his flatmate´s brother for his role as civilian worker in Auschwitz, and asked whether the Germans were planning to occupy the town again. As in PRAGUE I´s account, who felt a tacit, diffused prejudice of Czech population towards Germans, also in Sven´s story the prejudices can be linked to historical events and to the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War.

Chapter 4 illustrated the main findings of the thematic analysis of the data set. The first part of the report was purely descriptive and provided a comprehensive account of how the different themes were developed by the participants. The second section analysed and interpreted the themes within the theoretical framework on German collective memory of the Nazi past and on transnational study experiences provided in the first two chapters to answer the research questions. The chapter ended then with a brief reflection on the most recent generational shift which is currently affecting German society as presented in some newspaper articles and one movie.

Next chapter will summarise the findings of the data analysis in an attempt to answer the research question. The theoretical implications of this thesis as well as some suggestions for future research will also be presented in the Conclusion.

82 *Am Ende kommen Touristen*, directed by Robert Thalheim (2007, Berlin: XFilme) DVD, minute 10:21. Other similar episodes are when Sven was mocked by the old Polish man he was taking care of for not wearing a watch (apparently unacceptable for Germans) (minute 17:36) and when, in the same occasion, a friend of the old Zeitzeugen sneered at Sven and suggested to ask him whether he his grandfather had also worked in Auschwitz (minute 17:54).
CHAPTER 5 - Conclusion

This thesis was set out to analyse the experiences of German students in terms of negotiation of German collective memory of the Nazi past in transnational contexts. It has explored the construction of collective memory of the Nazi past at home and at school, identifying the nature of the relation between communicative and cultural memory and how young Germans mediate between the two different versions. The thesis has also sought to understand the reaction of German students when they face different articulations of the Nazi past during their ERASMUS stay.

This last chapter starts by briefly outlining the main findings in relation to the respective research questions. Then, it moves on to the description of the thesis’s theoretical implications and it concludes by suggesting some possible steps for future action in this field.

5.1 Answering the research question

The main findings have already been discussed at length in the previous chapter. This section summarises them in two different according to their focus to answer the research question.

- How do German students adapt, negotiate and re-interpret German collective memory of the Nazi past in the light of their ERASMUS experience?

The first part of the questionnaire was designed in order to investigate whether communicative and cultural memory are in conflict with one another in the experiences of young Germans. From the analysis and the interpretation of their answers, it appeared clear that the interpretations of the Nazi past constructed at home and at school were quite dissimilar. Differences - and at times even sticking points - could be noted both at content-level (focus on the victims at school and on the own family’s fate at school), and at approach-level (emotional approach sought through photos and movies at school and lack of emotive involvement and systematic dialogue at home). Only one student experienced a memory contest triggered by the clash between what was taught at school and what was told by the grandmother. In an attempt to erase any accusation of guilty against the own family members, the conflict was resolved in favour of the version told at home.
In the other cases, the emotional distance from the stories told by the grandparents or the lack of dialogue at home made the representations of the victims visualized through the photos of concentration camps remain impressed in the students’ minds the most.

To put it very briefly: the premises to trigger a memory contest are there, but the students perceive the differences between communicative and cultural memory in terms of complementarity rather than of tension.

- How do German students adapt, negotiate and re-interpret German collective memory of the Nazi past in the light of their ERASMUS experience?

Being confronted with the Nazi past abroad is an experience common to the majority of the participants. The topic can be touched upon in random situations, which usually refer to the role of the perpetrators rather than to the situation of the victims. Surprise and confusion are the most common reaction in this sense. This manifestation of a mild culture shock is however quickly overcome with the simple acknowledgment of the new articulations of meanings and without any judgment.

Situations in which the topic of the Nazi past is discussed through socialisation with peers have proven to remain impressed into the students’ minds the most and to have triggered a deeper reflection, which however was never particularly intense nor it had meaningful consequences.

To put it very briefly: the ERASMUS experiences had no considerable impact on the students’ perception of the Nazi past. Some possible motivations are the limited duration of the sojourn abroad, the superficiality of the contact with the new environment, and the fact that the memory of the Nazi past is not approached in a systematic way and with the intention of strengthen a social group identity as it happens at home or at school in Germany.

5.2 Theoretical implications

This thesis has sought to make a contribution to the field of German collective memory of the Nazi past approaching the issue from a transnational perspective. It is interested to note that, at the same time, the main findings of the analysis have also grasped the most recent developments of the relation between the Germans and the Nazi past and highlighted the current shift from the third to the fourth generation. Due to the increasing temporal distance from the Third Reich, young Germans have less often access to first-hand memories of that time, resulting in a less emotive approach to the
family stories and a more objective outlook towards the stances of the own ancestors during the Nazi time. As consequence, the thesis has exposed the fact that, while still fully maintaining their scientific relevance, previous empirical studies conducted at the beginning of the Twenty-first century (such as those carried out by Harald Welzer in 2002 and Gabriele Rosenthal in 1999), cannot be considered as a mirror of today’s situation in terms of generational family dialogue.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

If one the one hand qualitative surveys were proven to be a suitable method to collect the students’ experiences in an efficient way, the lack of direct contact between the researcher and the participant has surely had an impact on the quality of the data. Nevertheless, the thesis succeeded in providing a glimpse of the relevant themes concerning the experiences of German ERASMUS students in terms of negotiation of the Nazi past. Even though none of the participants radically reinterpreted their own stance towards the Third Reich during the ERASMUS stay, a correlation seemed to emerge between the active discussion of new articulations of the Nazi with peers in intercultural contexts and the depth of the resulting reflection. Future research in this field should therefore insist on this aspect and, by means of in-depth interviews, explore the experiences and the feelings of the students in this sense.

This thesis has failed in reaching a geographic diversification with regard to the students’ host universities. The variable of the location of the ERASMUS stay may actually play an important role. This is especially relevant in terms of the encounter of prejudices and stereotypes against the German, which, as the account of PRAGUE 1 has shown, may be a more diffused practice in Eastern Europe.

Even though more than seventy years have now passed since the of the Second World War, the relation of the Germans with the Nazi past remains current topic and a subject of great interest for both public opinion and scientific research. Thanks to its interdisciplinary approach, this thesis has paved the path towards the construction of a more comprehensive understanding of the construction and negotiation of collective memory of the Nazi past from a transnational perspective.
Bibliography


Transnationale Studienerfahrungen und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen

Liebe Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer,

im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit in dem Euroculture Master Programm an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Deutschland) und an der Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (Niederlande) führe ich eine Umfrage zum Thema ERASMUS-Studienaufenthalt und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen durch.

Ich freue mich, dass Sie sich ein wenig Zeit nehmen, um die folgenden Fragen zu antworten. Bitte füllen Sie die Fragebogen möglichst vollständig aus. Die Fragen können auch mit Stichpunkten beantwortet werden.

Ihre Angaben werden vertraulich behandelt, anonym verarbeitet und ausschließlich für Forschungszwecke verwendet.

Bei Fragen zur Umfrage schreiben Sie mir bitte eine Mail an debora.guanella@gmail.com.


Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!
Debora Guanella

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Allgemeine Hinweise über den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:
An welcher Partneruniversität haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt verbracht?
________________________________________________________________________________________

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?
________________________________________________________________________________________

Wie lang war Ihr ERASMUS-Aufenthalt? Bitte kreuzen Sie an:

( ) Ein Semester

( ) Ein Jahr

Mit wem haben Sie während Ihres ERASMUS-Aufenthalts am meisten Zeit verbracht? Bitte schätzen Sie die Zeit ab und geben Sie in Prozent (von 100%) an, wie viel Zeit Sie mit jeder Gruppe verbracht haben:

Mit anderen deutschen Studierenden: ________%
Mit anderen ausländischen Studierenden: _______%
Mit einheimischen Studierenden: _______%
Sonstige: ____________________ ( ______%)

**Vor dem ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:**

Schule und Familie sind die gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhänge, in denen über die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit am meisten diskutiert wird. Bitte beschreiben Sie, wie die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit behandelt wurden (Hintergründe, Wissen, Bilder, Gefühle…):

- In der Schule: _____________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________

- In Ihrer Familie:____________________________________________________________
  __________________________________________________________________________
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Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebrannt? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?

______________________________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Während des ERASMUS-Aufenthalts:
Denken Sie bitte an Ihren ERASMUS-Aufenthalt. Haben Sie sich innerhalb oder außerhalb der Universität Erlebnisse gehabt, in denen Verbrechen der NS-Zeit und die Erinnerung an diese erwähnt wurden? Denken Sie dabei bitte nicht nur an Vorlesungen und Seminare, aber auch an den Besuch von Museen oder Konzerte, an private Gespräche… Haben Sie sich in solchen (oder ähnlichen) Situationen befinden, in denen die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit oder die Erinnerung an sie erwähnt wurde? Beschreiben Sie bitte Ihre Erfahrung:
• Was ist passiert? Wo und wann ist es passiert? Wer war beteiligt? Welche Aspekte der NS-Verbrechen wurden angesprochen? Spielte hierbei eine spezifische Form der Erinnerung an NS-Verbrechen eine Rolle? – und wenn ja: Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

• Wie haben Sie auf diese Situationen reagiert? Haben diese Erfahrungen bei Ihnen zu einem intensiveren Nachdenken über die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit geführt oder hatten sie dagegen keine wichtige Bedeutung für Sie? Bitte beschreiben Sie Ihre Reaktion.

Zum Schluss kreuzen Sie bitte an, wie weit Sie mit der folgenden Aussage einverstanden sind:

„Meine ERASMUS-Erfahrungen hatte eine Wirkung auf meine eigene Haltung zur NS-Zeit“

( ) stimmt nicht
( ) stimmt wenig
( ) stimmt mittelmäßig
( ) stimmt ziemlich
( ) stimmt sehr

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!
Transnationale Studienerfahrungen und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen

Liebe Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer,

im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit in dem Euroculture Master Programm an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Deutschland) und an der Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (Niederlande) führe ich eine Umfrage zum Thema ERASMUS-Studienaufenthalt und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen durch.

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Bei Fragen zur Umfrage schreiben Sie mir bitte eine Mail an debora.guanella@gmail.com.


Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!
Debora Guanella

* * * * * * * * * * * * *

Allgemeine Hinweise über den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:

An welcher Partneruniversität haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt verbracht?
University of York, GB
Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?
Dezember 2014
Wie lang war Ihr ERASMUS-Aufenthalt? Bitte kreuzen Sie an:
( x ) Ein Semester
(     ) Ein Jahr

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Mit anderen deutschen Studierenden: ___55____%
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Vor dem ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:
Schule und Familie sind die gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhänge, in denen über die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit am meisten diskutiert wird. Bitte beschreiben Sie, wie die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit behandelt wurden (Hintergründe, Wissen, Bilder, Gefühle…):

- In der Schule:
  - Im Deutschunterricht durch Bücher wie „Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank“ oder „Als Hitler das Rosa Kaninchen stahl“; da dies bereits in der 6. Klasse stattfand ist meine Erinnerung daran jedoch sehr gering, der Fokus lag allerdings auf den jüdischen Opfern des NS

- In Ihrer Familie:
  - Im Rest meiner Familie gab es keine Diskussion zum Thema, an die ich mich erinnere.
Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

- Aufgrund der wenigen Diskussionen in meiner Familie kann ich diese Frage leider kaum beantworten. Aufgefallen ist mir nur, dass es in der Schule so dargestellt wurde, als wären alle Deutschen vom NS betroffen gewesen, während meine Großeltern es so darstellten, als hätte dies eher Menschen in Städten betroffen und sei auf dem Land wenig präsent gewesen.

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingegrann? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?


- Außerdem haben mich Filme wie Schindlers Liste, Hitler-Aufstieg des Bösen oder Verfilmungen zu Anne Frank sehr geprägt. Zwar werden hier nur selten Originalaufnahmen eingepflegt, aber diese Filme realisieren das Grauen in sehr erschreckender Form und haben sicherlich zu einer noch stärkeren Ablehnung des NS meinerseits geführt, weil sie es mir als Kind leichter gemacht haben die Verbrechen zu erfassen.

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Zum Glück bin ich zu keinem Zeitpunkt auf Vorurteile gestoßen.

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_____University of York______________________________________________________

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?

_____2013_____________________________________________________________

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( x ) Ein Semester
(     ) Ein Jahr

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Mit anderen deutschen Studierenden: __40__%
Mit anderen ausländischen Studierenden: ___55___%  
Mit einheimischen Studierenden: ___5___%  
Sonstige: ____________________ ( _____%)

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______________________________________________________________________________  
______________________________________________________________________________  
______________________________________________________________________________  
______________________________________________________________________________


Sie hatte auch ein Bild meines Großvaters in Marineuniform von 1944 auf der Anrichte stehen und ich wusste früh, dass er sich den Anker auf den seinen Unterarm, den ich von Fotos kenne, in seiner Zeit in Gefangenschaft in Frankreich gestochen wurde. Dieser Erinnerung war meiner Großmutter wichtig, denn der Krieg hatte ihr trotz allem meinen
Großvater ins Ruhrgebiet geschickt. Seine Heimat in Pommern gab es nicht mehr, also ist er ins Ruhrgebiet gezogen.

Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?
In der Familie wurde viel das persönliche Schicksal besprochen, in der Schule das der Verfolgen. Die Zerstörung von Wohnraum waren in der Schule Prozentzahlen, in der Familie der Verlust des eigenen alten Zuhause.

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebraucht? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?

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Ich habe ein Seminar zu Modern Britain in York belegt und da war immer etwas wie die Expertenstimme aus Deutschland. Da habe ich aber mehr zur Industrialisierung und der Vorkriegszeit betragen können als zum NS. Wobei, so meine ich mich zu erinnern, mein Dozent davon angetan war, dass deutsche Studierende auch die Geschichte ihres eigenen Landes direkt kritisch betrachten und nicht nur die Sonnenseiten rausgreifen und auch mal in eigenen Wunden reiben.


Als mein Dozent mich darauf angesprochen hat, konnte ich berichten, dass wir schon in der Schule dazu „erzogen“ würden, uns mit der eigenen Geschichte kritische auseinander zu setzten. Was aber auch recht einfach ist, da das NS-System ja auch bei uns im Common Sense als kritische gesehen wird. In der Britischen Geschichte gibt es eben mehr historische Streitpunkte z.B. die Thatcher-Ära oder auch den Eintritt in die EU.

Ich selbst habe mein Bild über die NS-Zeit während meines Erasmus-Aufenthaltes nicht verändert.


Zum Schluss kreuzen Sie bitte an, wie weit Sie mit der folgenden Aussage einverstanden sind:

„Meine ERASMUS-Erfahrungen hatte eine Wirkung auf meine eigene Haltung zur NS-Zeit“

( x) stimmt nicht
(   ) stimmt wenig
(   ) stimmt mittelmäßig
(   ) stimmt ziemlich
(   ) stimmt sehr

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An welcher Partneruniversität haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt verbracht?

University of York (UK)

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?

2015

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( ) Ein Jahr

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Mit anderen ausländischen Studierenden: ______%  
Mit einheimischen Studierenden: ______%  
Sonstige: Dozenten (____%)  

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- In der Schule: _____________________________________________________________
- _______________________________________________________________________
- _______________________________________________________________________
- _______________________________________________________________________
- _______________________________________________________________________
- - Im Geschichtsunterricht, recht ausführlich.
- - Bei der Beschäftigung mit dem NS waren die Verbrechen – etwa neben der Außenpolitik von 1933 bis 1939 – ein Schwerpunkt
- - Insbesondere ging es um den Holocaust, und dabei um Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager, weniger um die Einsatzgruppen an der Front
- - Tendenziell lag der Fokus auf der Täterseite
  Ich erinnere mich, dass die Auseinandersetzung mit den NS-Verbrechen angenehm wenig moralisierend und politisch-pädagogisch war
- - Wir haben viele außerschulische Einrichtungen besucht, die sich mit NS-Verbrechen befassen (Gedenkstätten, Museen etc.)
- - In Ihrer Familie:_________________________________________________________
  - _______________________________________________________________________
  - _______________________________________________________________________
  - _______________________________________________________________________
  - _______________________________________________________________________
  - Praktisch gar keine Diskussion
  Mein Großvater war Soldat im 2. WK, aber darüber haben wir wenig gesprochen. Das lag nicht daran, dass er sich geweigert hätte, darüber zu sprechen, sondern daran, dass er nicht gefragt wurde. Ich habe keinerlei Anhaltspunkte dafür, dass er an Verbrechen beteiligt war.
  Am ehesten noch Berührung durch Fernsehsendungen oder Filme über die NS-Zeit. Da gab es aber eigentlich keine Diskussionen und auch sonst keine wirkliche emotionale Regung (weder Betroffenheit noch Revisionismus, weder bei mir noch bei anderen Familienmitgliedern)
Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

Insofern, als in der Familie praktisch gar nicht diskutiert wurde, kann ich keine weitergehenden Unterschiede ausmachen

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebrannt? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?

„eingebannt“ ist ein bisschen übertrieben, aber am ehesten kommen Bilder von Eingängen von Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagern in den Sinn („Arbeit macht frei“-Schriftzüge etc.)

Diese Bilder lenken den Fokus stark auf die Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager und lassen einen die anderen Orte des Verbrechens (Front, besetzte Gebiete, auch Deutschland etc.) visuell etwas verdrängen. Dafür muss man sich sensibilisieren und dem entgegenwirken

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Ich habe ein wenig darüber nachgedacht, inwiefern Deutschland heutzutage in der Verantwortung ist (oder nicht ist), sich (besonders in politischer Hinsicht) anders zu verhalten als andere Staaten, weil es den NS gab. Das war kein wahnsinnig intensives und langes Nachdenken und es hatte auch keine tiefen Auswirkungen, aber ich finde insgesamt, die NS-Vergangenheit sollte Deutschlands heutige (Außen-)Politik nicht lenken. Das freilich heißt nicht, dass der vielzitierte 'Schlussstrich' gezogen werden sollte.

Keine Vorurteile. Die englischen Studenten waren mir gegenüber aufgeschlossen und waren Deutschland gegenüber grundsätzlich positiv eingestellt. Deutschlands NS-Vergangenheit schien für sie keine große Rolle zu spielen, jedenfalls haben sie mich nicht darauf angesprochen.

Zum Schluss kreuzen Sie bitte an, wie weit Sie mit der folgenden Aussage einverstanden sind:
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Transnationale Studienerfahrungen und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen

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An welcher Partneruniversität haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt verbracht?

An der University of York, Großbritannien

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?
Der Aufenthalt dauerte vom September 2012 bis Dezember 2012

Wie lang war Ihr ERASMUS-Aufenthalt? Bitte kreuzen Sie an:

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Im Großen und Ganzen decken sich die Themen. Worüber im familiären Rahmen jedoch kaum gesprochen wurde, war die Deportation von Juden und anderen Verfolgtengruppen bzw. das Bewusstsein darüber, dass diese geschah. Auch über die Gesinnung meiner Großeltern während dieser Zeit wurde nicht völlig offen gesprochen, wobei mich hierbei vor allem die Gesinnung meines Großvaters interessiert hätte. Dieser ist jedoch, als ich noch deutlich jünger war, verstorben. Im Nachhinein denke ich aber auch, dass er es uns mitgeteilt hätte, wenn er es gewollt hätte. Mit beiden Themen muss man, denke ich, sensibel umgehen und sich gleichzeitig klar darüber sein, dass uns heute kein Urteil darüber zusteht, warum die Menschen damals so berauscht von der Persönlichkeit Hitlers waren und sich diesem nicht widersetzten.

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebrannt? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?


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( ) stimmt ziemlich
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Liebe Debora Guanella,


Viele Grüße,

Carolin Bodmann
Transnationale Studienerfahrungen und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen

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Københavns Universitet

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?
2015

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Mit einheimischen Studierenden: 10%
Sonstige: Einheimische Mitbewohnerin (10%)

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- In der Schule:
Besuch des jüdischen Museums in Berlin.


Gegenbewegungen: Geschwister Scholl, mehrere versuchte Anschläge auf Hitler (*Wut, dass das nicht geklappt hat. Bewunderung für den Mut der beiden Scholls, die so jung für den Widerstand gestorben sind*).

Bedürfnis wäre, über diese Zeit zu sprechen. Dann aber Verständnis, da Schuldgefühle und Scham vermutlich eine große Rolle spielten.

Tagebuch der Anne Frank gelesen und besprochen.

Andorra von Max Frisch gelesen und den dortigen Antisemitismus reflektiert und in Bezug zur NS-Zeit gesetzt.

- In Ihrer Familie:

Inhaltlich liefen die Gespräche hierzu ähnlich ab. Wir hatten allerdings keine Bilder oder ähnliches. Mein Opa väterlicherseits war Flugzeugbauer. Um nicht an die Front zu müssen, wurde er nach Polen geschickt, um dort zu arbeiten. Er wurde von meinem Vater als eher unpoltisch beschrieben. Da mein Uropa sozialistisch eingestellt war und aktiv in der Arbeiterbewegung, wurde dieser entlassen. Was zu einer Abneigung gegenüber Politik bei meinem Opa geführt haben soll.

Darüber hinaus weiß ich, dass meine Oma mit ihren Kindern (mein Vater war noch nicht geboren) mit der Gustlov hätte fahren sollen. Da sie Angst vor Schiffen hatte, hat sie sich geweigert mizutahren und ist in einem Zug mit deutschen Soldaten untergekommen, die Polen verließen.


Mein Onkel väterlicherseits hat einmal den Spruch fallen lassen, wir hätten dank Hitler die Autobahn. Daraufhin hatte er eine große Diskussion mit meinem Vater, der ihm die Unsinnigkeit dieser Aussage vorgeworfen hat, da diese Straßen ja schließlich für Panzer, Soldaten etc. und somit für den Krieg gebaut worden wären. Ihre Existenz heute zwar praktisch sei, aber man wirklich keine Dankbarkeit gegenüber den Nationalsozialisten empfinden könne, da der eigentliche Zweck dieser Straßen kein vertretbarer sei.

Wir haben häufiger in der Kernfamilie (Mutter, Vater, Schwester) darüber gesprochen, wie unvorstellbar die Taten der NS-Zeit sind und ob so etwas, wohl wieder passieren könnte. Dabei hat mein Vater immer wieder betont, dass man gegenüber nationalsozialistischem Gedankengut immer Stellung beziehen sollte um deren Thesen zu wiederlegen und ihnen somit nicht das Gefühl von Akzeptanz in der Gesellschaft zu vermitteln.
Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebrannt? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?
Fotos von Leichenbergen, Seife und Lampenschirme aus Menschen. In Schulbüchern und im Museum Buchenwald (privater Besuch). Sorge und Angst, das Menschen zu so etwas im Stande sind und ich halte es für möglich, dass Menschen so etwas immer noch oder wieder tun, wenn sie nicht ausreichend und vielseitig gebildet werden, vor allem was ihre sozialen Kompetenzen angeht (Verantwortungsbewusstsein, Mitgefühl, Zivilcourage).

Der Film Schindlers Liste: Der Darsteller, der den Aufseher im KZ spielt. Gefühlskalt, Angsteinflößend, wohlerzogen, gute Manieren, insgeheim sadistisch.


Der junge im gestreiften Pyjama: einfach nur traurig. Ich habe so geweint am Ende des Buchs.

Inglorious Bastard: Christoph Waltz als Nazi. Schlimmste Vorstellung, so einem Menschen jemals zu begegnen. Eloquent, gut aussehend, nett, höflich, gebildet, mehrsprachig und absolut bereit zu töten.

**Während des ERASMUS-Aufenthalts:**
Denken Sie bitte an Ihren ERASMUS-Aufenthalt. Haben Sie sich innerhalb oder außerhalb der Universität Erlebnisse gehabt, in denen Verbrechen der NS-Zeit und die Erinnerung an diese erwähnt wurden? Denken Sie dabei bitte nicht nur an Vorlesungen und Seminare, aber auch an den Besuch von Museen oder Konzerte, an private Gespräche... Haben Sie sich in solchen (oder ähnlichen) Situationen befunden, in denen die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit oder die Erinnerung an sie erwähnt wurde? Beschreiben Sie bitte Ihre Erfahrung:

- Was ist passiert? Wo und wann ist es passiert? Wer war beteiligt? Welche Aspekte der NS-Verbrechen wurden angesprochen? Spielte hierbei eine spezifische Form der Erinnerung an NS-Verbrechen eine Rolle? – und wenn ja: Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?
In der „dänische Kultur und Geschichte Vorlesung“: Der dänische König, der zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in Deutschland und der Besetzung Dänemarks, der Repräsentant des Königshauses war, hat sich einen Davidstern auf die Kleidung genäht und die Bevölkerung zur Nachahmung aufgefordert. Sie seien alle Juden.


Eine deutsche Freundin und ich haben uns über die Entstehung der PEGIDA in Deutschland unterhalten und kamen somit auf die NS-Zeit. Sie hat geäußert, dass sie fest überzeugt sei, die meisten unserer Großeltern hätten eine Nazivergangenheit, über die sie bloß nicht reden wollen/wollten. Diese Freundin war auch sehr kritisch gegenüber dem dänischen Königshaus und dem durchaus verbreiteten dänischen Nationalismus eingestellt.

Eben diese Freundin hat einen Dänen kennengelernt, der ein Profilbild hatte, auf dem es so aussah, als würde ein Hitlerfoto im Hintergrund hängen. Wir haben ausführlich darüber diskutiert, ob sie sich noch mit ihm treffen soll. Wir sind zu dem Schluss gekommen, dass sie ihn darauf ansprechen muss und auf keinen Fall mit jemandem befreundet sein kann, der ein Hitlerfoto in der Wohnung hängen hat.


Diese Informationen/ Gespräche waren für mich jeweils sehr interessant. Vor allem meine deutsche Studienfreundin hat mich durch ihre politische Korrektheit und Aufmerksamkeit sehr für nationalistische, fremdenfeindliche, frauenfeindliche etc. Pauschalaussagen und Begebenheiten sensibilisiert.


Mir sind keine Vorurteile entgegengebracht worden, die mit den NS-Verbrechen in Verbindung standen.

Ich wurde lediglich als „Wikinger“ bezeichnet, weil ich Deutsche bin. Und dies von einem angetrunkenen Amerikaner in einer Bar.
Zum Schluss kreuzen Sie bitte an, wie weit Sie mit der folgenden Aussage einverstanden sind: „Meine ERASMUS-Erfahrungen hatte eine Wirkung auf meine eigene Haltung zur NS-Zeit“

(   ) stimmt nicht
(x) stimmt wenig
(   ) stimmt mittelmäßig
(   ) stimmt ziemlich
(   ) stimmt sehr

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!
Transnationale Studienerfahrungen und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen

Liebe Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer,

im Rahmen meiner Masterarbeit in dem Euroculture Master Programm an der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Deutschland) und an der Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (Niederlande) führe ich eine Umfrage zum Thema ERASMUS-Studienaufenthalt und Auseinandersetzung mit den Nazi-Verbrechen durch.

Ich freue mich, dass Sie sich ein wenig Zeit nehmen, um die folgenden Fragen zu antworten. Bitte füllen Sie die Fragebogen möglichst vollständig aus. Die Fragen können auch mit Stichpunkten beantwortet werden.

Ihre Angaben werden vertraulich behandelt, anonym verarbeitet und ausschließlich für Forschungszwecke verwendet.

Bei Fragen zur Umfrage schreiben Sie mir bitte eine Mail an debora.guanella@gmail.com.


Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme!
Debora Guanella

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Allgemeine Hinweise über den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:

An welcher Partneruniversität haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt verbracht?
Karlsuniversität Prag

Wann haben Sie den ERASMUS-Aufenthalt abgeschlossen?

Wie lang war Ihr ERASMUS-Aufenthalt? Bitte kreuzen Sie an:
( X ) Ein Semester
(     ) Ein Jahr

Mit wem haben Sie während Ihres ERASMUS-Aufenthalts am meisten Zeit verbracht? Bitte schätzen Sie die Zeit ab und geben Sie in Prozent (von 100%) an, wie viel Zeit Sie mit jeder Gruppe verbrachten haben:
- Mit anderen deutschen Studierenden: 25 %
- Mit anderen ausländischen Studierenden: 45 %
Mit einheimischen Studierenden: 30 %
Sonstige: ____________________ ( ______%)

Vor dem ERASMUS-Aufenthalt:
Schule und Familie sind die gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhänge, in denen über die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit am meisten diskutiert wird. Bitte beschreiben Sie, wie die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit behandelt wurden (Hintergründe, Wissen, Bilder, Gefühle…):

• In der Schule:
  o Thema eher oberflächlich und allgemein besprochen
  o Schwarz-Weiß-Denken und Kategorisieren: der verbrecherische Nazi, der heldenhafte Widerstandskämpfer, etc.
  o Gefühl: Lehrer will Thema nicht behandeln oder weiss nicht wirklich, wie er es behandeln soll, ohne irgendwelche Fauxpas zu begehen » der Lehrer brachte lieber verschiedene TV-Dokumentationen mit, die er gemeinsam mit uns Schülern ansah, aber nicht weiter besprach
  o die Grausamkeit der Verbrechen wurde allerdings klar benannt und darauf verwiesen, dass nicht nur Juden Opfer des NS-Regimes waren
  o im Vordergrund stand weniger die Besprechung von Hintergründen oder Handlungssträngen als die Betrachtung einzelner (punktualer) Ereignisse: z. Bsp.: Reichskristallnacht,

• In Ihrer Familie:
  - Themen eingehender besprochen und einfache Kategorisierungen abgelehnt
  - Familienmitglieder, die die Zeit erlebt haben, schilderten ihre Erinnerungen - was haben sie, nach eigener Meinung, als Kinder auf dem Dorf mitbekommen
  - Hinterfragen von Motiven und Entwicklungen: woher kommt Antisemitismus, wieso konnte es überhaupt zur Shoa kommen
  - Gefühl: meine Generation kann nichts für die grausamen Verbrechen der Nationalsozialisten, aber es ist unsere Pflicht dafür zu sorgen, dass so etwas nicht noch einmal passiert
  - Besuch von Ausstellungen, z.Bsp.: Obersalzberg

Gab es Unterschiede oder eher Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen dem, was Sie in der Schule gelernt habe und was in Ihrer Familie diskutiert wurde? Wie würden Sie diese beschreiben?

• in der Familie wurden die Themen differenzierter und tiefgreifender diskutiert unter Vermeidung von zu kurzgreifenden Verallgemeinerungen
Diskussionen innerhalb der Familie haben die in der Schule angesprochenen Themen vertieft und versucht Zusammenhänge herzustellen.

Welche Bilder von Tätern und Opfern haben sich am meisten in Ihr Gedächtnis eingebrannt? Wissen Sie noch, in welchen Medien Sie auf diese Bilder gestoßen sind? Wie haben diese Bilder Ihre eigene Wahrnehmung der Nazi-Verbrechen strukturiert?

1.) Bilder von ausgehungerten und dem Tode nahen KZ-Gefangenen bei der Befreiung durch die Alliierten bzw. die Bilder der Toten. » Schulbuch, Dokumentationen
2.) Bilder von den Nürnberger Prozessen, auf denen die Angeklagten völlig teilnahmslos und desinteressiert dem Prozess folgen. » Dokumentation
3.) Bilder von den Aufmärschen im Rahmen der Reichsparteitage in Nürnberg. » Schulbuch
5.) Aufnahme von Freisler bei einer seiner Tiraden vor dem Volksgerichtshof. » Dokumentation.

Jedes Bild ruft verschiedenen Aspekte des NS-Regimes wach - die Opfer, die massenhaften Mitläufer, die „Verbrecher“.

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1.) Seminar: „Nazi-Propaganda im Film - Riefenstahl, Harlan, Goebbels“
- deutsche und tschechische Studenten schauten gemeinsam Filme oder Filmausschnitte von NS-Propagandafilmen an, die u.a. die Unterschiede der Rassen, die Aktion „Heim ins Reich“ oder die deutsche Überlegenheit propagieren sollten.
- Im Rahmen der anschließenden Diskussionen wurden verschiedene NS-Verbrechen erwähnt: an den Juden, an den Völkern Osteuropas, an (laut NS-Propaganda) sogenannten „Rassenschändern“.
- Ich würde nicht sagen, dass es hierbei eine besondere Form der Erinnerung gab, sondern mehr ein gemeinsames erinnern an alle Opfer des Nationalsozialismus stattfand.

2.) Stadtführung durch Prag
- u.a. Besuch des ehemaligen jüdischen Viertels - Prag und Tschechien hatte früher eine große jüdische Gemeinde. Historisch gesehen, waren sie immer wieder verschiedenen politischen Situationen ausgeliefert, aber unter NS-Herrschaft landeten fast alle jüdischen Einwohner im KZ, was nur sehr wenige überlebten.
- Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung (Shoa); Antijudaismus immer ein Problem gewesen, aber durch NS wurde der Antisemitismus systematisiert.

• Wie haben Sie auf diese Situationen reagiert? Haben diese Erfahrungen bei Ihnen zu einem intensiveren Nachdenken über die Verbrechen der NS-Zeit geführt oder hatten sie dagegen keine wichtige Bedeutung für Sie? Bitte beschreiben Sie Ihre Reaktion.

zu1) Ich denke, dass mich diese intensiven Diskussionen dazu bewegten, eigene Überlegungen mit einer Gruppe von Menschen zu teilen und manche neuen Aspekte zu meinem Gedankengerüst hinzufügen.

zu 2) Ich habe wieder mal erkannt, dass man als Deutscher überall und jeder Zeit damit rechnen muss, mit den Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus konfrontiert zu werden. Fühlte mich (mal wieder) irgendwie etwas schuldig, weil die Nationalsozialisten (Deutsche) solche bestialischen Verbrechen begangen haben.


Zum Schluss kreuzen Sie bitte an, wie weit Sie mit der folgenden Aussage einverstanden sind:
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