

# “Aufarbeitung”: Dealing with difficult pasts – in Berlin and elsewhere

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| <b>Semester:</b>          | Summer semester 2018                      |
| <b>Course instructor:</b> | Elena Demke. Email: elena.demke@posteo.de |
| <b>Subject area:</b>      | Social Sciences                           |
| <b>Credits:</b>           | 5 ECTS                                    |
| <b>Time:</b>              | Wednesday 12 – 14 c.t.                    |
| <b>Room:</b>              | 0323-26                                   |

## Course description:

The German term “Aufarbeitung” is often considered to be “untranslatable”, at least not to be captured by one word in English. However, struggles of coming to terms with an unjust, violent and often murderous past can be studied worldwide. Originally referring to Germany’s obligation to confront its Nazi past, “Aufarbeitung” in Germany today concerns also the legacy of the SED-rule in Communist East Germany as well as transgressions and injustices that were committed on either side of the Cold War frontier, such as violence against children in institutions and families. The seminar will introduce students to the historical background and theory of “Aufarbeitung” and related concepts such as “transitional justice” and “politics of memory” and ask for the role these concepts grant to memorialization. Students will study the history, aims and practices of some of the major memorial sites, state commissions and NGO’s addressing difficult pasts in Berlin. These are considered as case studies that help us to focus on general questions such as: Who are the agents, what the aims and what the effects of “Aufarbeitung”? What processes of inclusion or exclusion can be observed? The last phase of the seminar will be dedicated to the in-depth study of practices of “Aufarbeitung” from different contexts and countries – students are invited to set the agenda collaboratively. Final assignments will be contributions for a joined teamwork product (blog, podcast ...) on “Aufarbeitung – a German thing?” (this is a working title, decision on final title will be made collectively).

## Learning objectives:

Understanding an outline of contemporary German history and the ways in which past violence and injustices were addressed, compensated – or covered up.  
Differentiating/Analyzing the roles of various agents (state, NGO’s, public opinion) and the conflicting interests of groups involved. Assessing processes of exclusion and inclusion of

marginalized groups in the construction of cultural memory. Making a transfer from German examples to international instances of dealing with difficult pasts. By the end of the course, students will be able to:

### Knowledge

- Gain an overview of some of the most important memorial sites in Berlin, understanding their political and cultural backgrounds.
- Understand concepts of “Aufarbeitung” and transitional justice

### Academic/Transferrable Skills

- Analyze and critically reflect on the chances and limitations of public rituals of commemoration
- Analyze, communicate and discuss memorial sites as a combination of historical topographies and present-day creations

### Competencies

- Read samples of German historiography and political theory analyzing the goals and practices of “Aufarbeitung”
- Apply findings from samples of Berlin’s memorial culture to the analysis of another memorial site or other initiative of commemoration

### **Assessment**

- Regular attendance, active participation: 25%
- Two group presentations (no longer than 12 minutes; one will be a presentation of results from your visit to a memorial site; one will be about your final assignment): 25%
- Final project will be a collective product, e.g. a blog about memorial cultures. In addition to your contribution to this product (which may be one page of text plus photos), you will have to hand in a more lengthy and academic written reflection: about 6 pages/2.500 words, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12. Deadline: 13.7.2018: 50%

### **Language requirements:**

A high level of academic spoken and written English is required (at least B2). Discussions in class will be in English, set reading will be in English, too. However, the course offers scope to practice German language skills: additional reading in German will be made available; when visiting Berlin’s memorial sites, students are encouraged to make up groups so that at least one participant has some reading knowledge of German. .

## **Timetable:**

**(semester times: April 17<sup>th</sup>-July 20<sup>th</sup>)**

Session 1: 18.04.2018 Getting to know each other, the structure and the aims of the course, discussing how the expertise from various backgrounds will become relevant.

Assignment for next class: Online research on the range of theories of Aufarbeitung and transitional justice, Reading Assmann 2010; preparing set questions for class.

Session 2: 25.04.2018 The role of memorialization in the context of various theories of Aufarbeitung and transitional justice.

Assignment for next class: Reading Norbert Frei 2010; Preparing set questions for class.

Session 3: 02.05.2018

After 1945: Dealing with the Nazi past in post-war Germany – Overview about agents, periods and practices.

Assignment for next class: Visiting memorial sites in small groups: “Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz” OR “Gedenkstätte Sachsenhausen” OR “Topography of Terror” (Former Gestapo Headquarters) OR “Holocaust Memorial”, Reading Frei, 2005.

NO SESSION ON 9th MAY

Session 4: 16.05.2018 Presenting and discussing results from your visits.

Assignment for next class: Reading Sabrow, 2007.

Session 5: 23.05.2018 After 1989: Dealing with the SED-Dictatorship in unified Germany – agents, periods and practices.

Assignment for next class: visit either the Stasi-museum at Normannenstraße OR the Berlin Wall memorial in Bernauer Straße.

Session 6: 30.05.2018 Presenting and discussing results from your visits.

Assignment for next class: Visit one of the following memorial sites: Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under National Socialism; OR Memorial of victims of the so-called “euthanasia killings” OR Memorial to the Sinti and Roma murdered under National Socialism, questions on you visits, preparing set questions for class.

Session 7: 06.06.2018 Marginalization and memorialization. Discussing results from your visits.

Assignment for next class: online research on international examples of state commissions dealing with child abuse, preparing set questions for class.

Session 8: 13.06.2018 "Aufarbeitung" internationally and beyond boundaries of specific political systems: State Commissions dealing with child abuse

Assignment for next class: to be announced

Session 9: 20.06.2018 Preliminary summary: Notions of "Truth", "Authenticity", and the media factor in memorialization.

Assignment for next class: Choosing your case studies for final assignments.

Session 9 : 27.06.2018 Discussing work on final assignments; planning of joined final product

Assignment for classes 10-12: Classes will be dedicated to mentoring work on final assignments and the joined final product. Tasks will be set week by week.

Session 10: 04.07.2018 Group presentations

Session 11: 11.07.2018 Working towards the joined final product.

Session 12: 18.07.2018 Closure and feedback.

**Literature: Will be made available in moodle, some texts may be distributed in class.**

Aleida Assmann, "From Collective Violence to a Common Future: Four Models for Dealing with a Traumatic Past," in: Helen Gonçalves da Silva et al. (eds.), *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2010, pp. 8-23.

Tim Garton Ash, *Insight the Stasi Files. The Communist Past in Post-Communist Europe*.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnQFJsOHI68>

Susanne Buckel-Zistel, *Transitional Justice Theories*, Abingdon 2014.

Norbert Frei, *Auschwitz and the Germans: History, Knowledge and Memory*, in: N. Gregor (Hrsg.), *Nazism, War and Genocide. Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes*. Exeter 2005, pp. 147-165.

Norbert Frei, *1945 - 1949 - 1989: Dealing with Two German Pasts*, in: *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 56 (2010) 3, pp. 411-423.

Martin Sabrow, *The Quarrel over the Stasi Files*, in: Astrid M. Eckert (Hg.), *Institutions of Public Memory. The Legacies of German and American Politicians*, Washington 2007, pp. 46-52.

James E Young, The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials in History, in: A. Erll u.a., Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, Berlin 2008, pp. 357-366.

**Remarks:**

- While the course aims at a critical analysis of memorial culture, its chances and limitations, respect for a broad variety of approaches to dealing with traumatic pasts is expected. Such approaches are culturally and sometimes religiously framed and these frameworks will be respected by us– we are not talking about right or wrong, better or worse but striving to appreciate the diversity of memorial cultures
- Attendance policy: 80% attendance needed in order to pass; absences need to be excused and backed up by doctor's certificate etc.