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PROJECT

Comparison Controversies: Conflicts in Cultural Memory

Drawing on two decades of research on the memory of the Holocaust and other histories of political violence, I will focus on what I call “comparison controversies” – impassioned public debates that emerge from provocative historical comparisons or from the use of historical analogies to describe contemporary crises. My book, *Comparison Controversies: Conflicts in Cultural Memory*, will consider a series of case studies: debates about the comparison of the Holocaust in Germany, about fascism in the United States, and about the use of Holocaust analogies as responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis of global warming. Working from those cases, as well as from ongoing controversies such as the use of references to Nazism and the Holocaust in wars in Russia-Ukraine and the Middle East, it will seek to address urgent questions about the ethics and politics of comparison and about the uses and abuses of public memory. Indeed, the proliferation of comparison controversies in our day seems to correspond to the difficulty of understanding a present and a rapidly approaching future that are marked by social, ecological, and political emergencies. As crises unfold and catastrophes loom, we turn to the past for orientation – correctly, since historical analogies can help guide action in the present, but also with obvious disadvantages, since comparisons and analogies can only ever be imperfect instruments for measuring novel conditions. Without slighting an assessment of comparison’s flaws and dangers, *Comparison Controversies* will make an affirmative argument for the critical, indeed unavoidable, nature of comparison as a feature of human cognition and ethical action.

Recommended Reading

Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

–. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

–. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019.

COLLOQUIUM, 28.01.2025

Comparison Controversies and the Dynamics of Holocaust Memory

What is the status of Holocaust memory eighty years after the liberation of Auschwitz? In my colloquium, I will

approach this question from the perspective of what I call “comparison controversies.” Comparison controversies consist of impassioned public debates that emerge from provocative historical comparisons or from the use of historical analogies to describe contemporary crises. Since October 7, 2023, political speeches, artworks, essays, and videos, among other phenomena, have generated controversy by connecting recent events in Israel and Gaza to National Socialism and the Holocaust. Such controversies are by no means novel occurrences, however. While the core of my talk will focus on post-October 7/Gaza examples, I will consider those examples in relation to a larger context of comparison controversies and in a longer trajectory of Holocaust memory. Surveying a number of examples from different realms will allow us to begin sketching the dynamics and stakes of comparative Holocaust memory.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Rothberg, Michael (Berlin,2021)

Multidirektionale Erinnerung : Holocaustgedenken im Zeitalter der Dekolonisierung

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=173514634X>

Multidirectional memory

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=173514634X>

Rothberg, Michael (Stanford, California,2019)

The implicated subject : beyond victims and perpetrators

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1663871450>

Cultural memory in the present

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1663871450>

Rothberg, Michael (London [u.a.],2011)

Memory citizenship : migrant archives of Holocaust remembrance in contemporary Germany

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1916116655>

Rothberg, Michael (Stanford, California,2009)

Multidirectional memory : remembering the Holocaust in the age of decolonization

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1623775566>

Multidirectional memory

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1623775566>

Rothberg, Michael (Edinburgh,2003)

The Holocaust : theoretical readings

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1603717072>

Rothberg, Michael (Minneapolis [u.a.],2000)

Traumatic realism : the demands of Holocaust representation

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=336238495>